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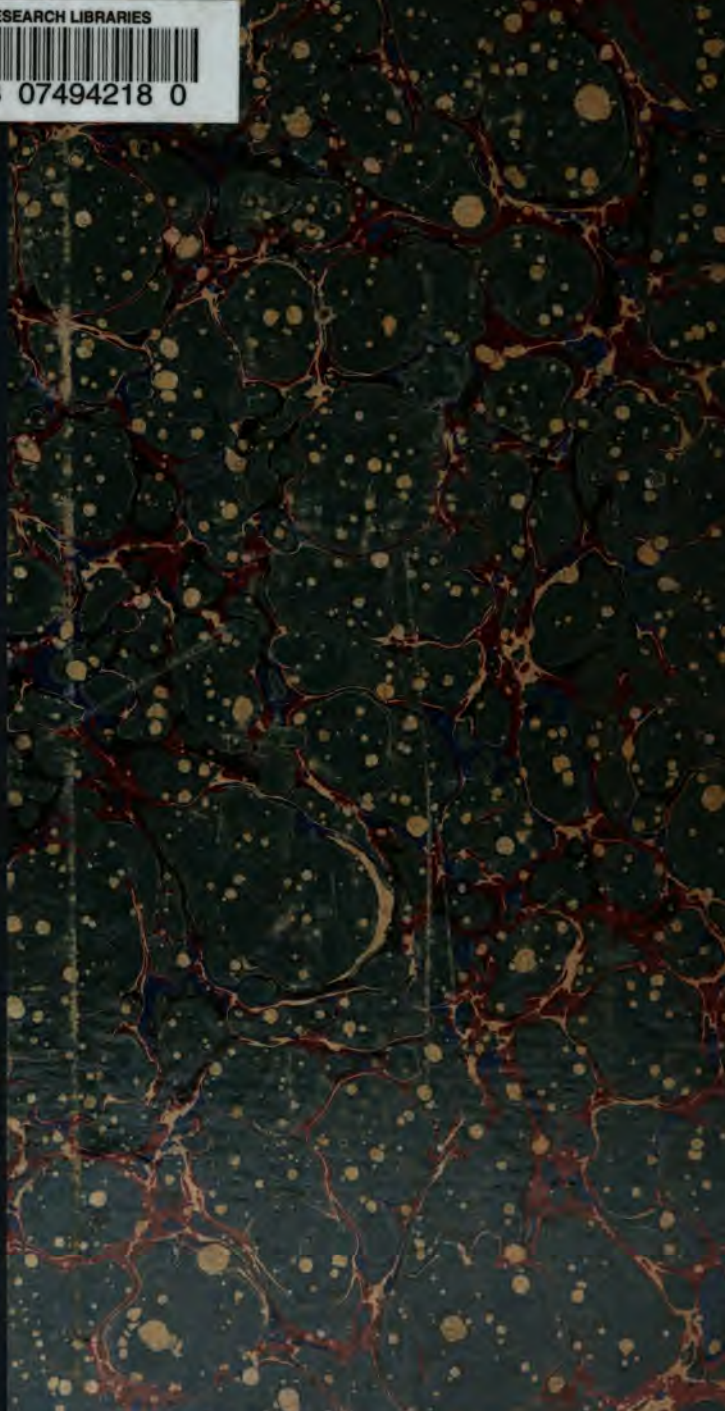
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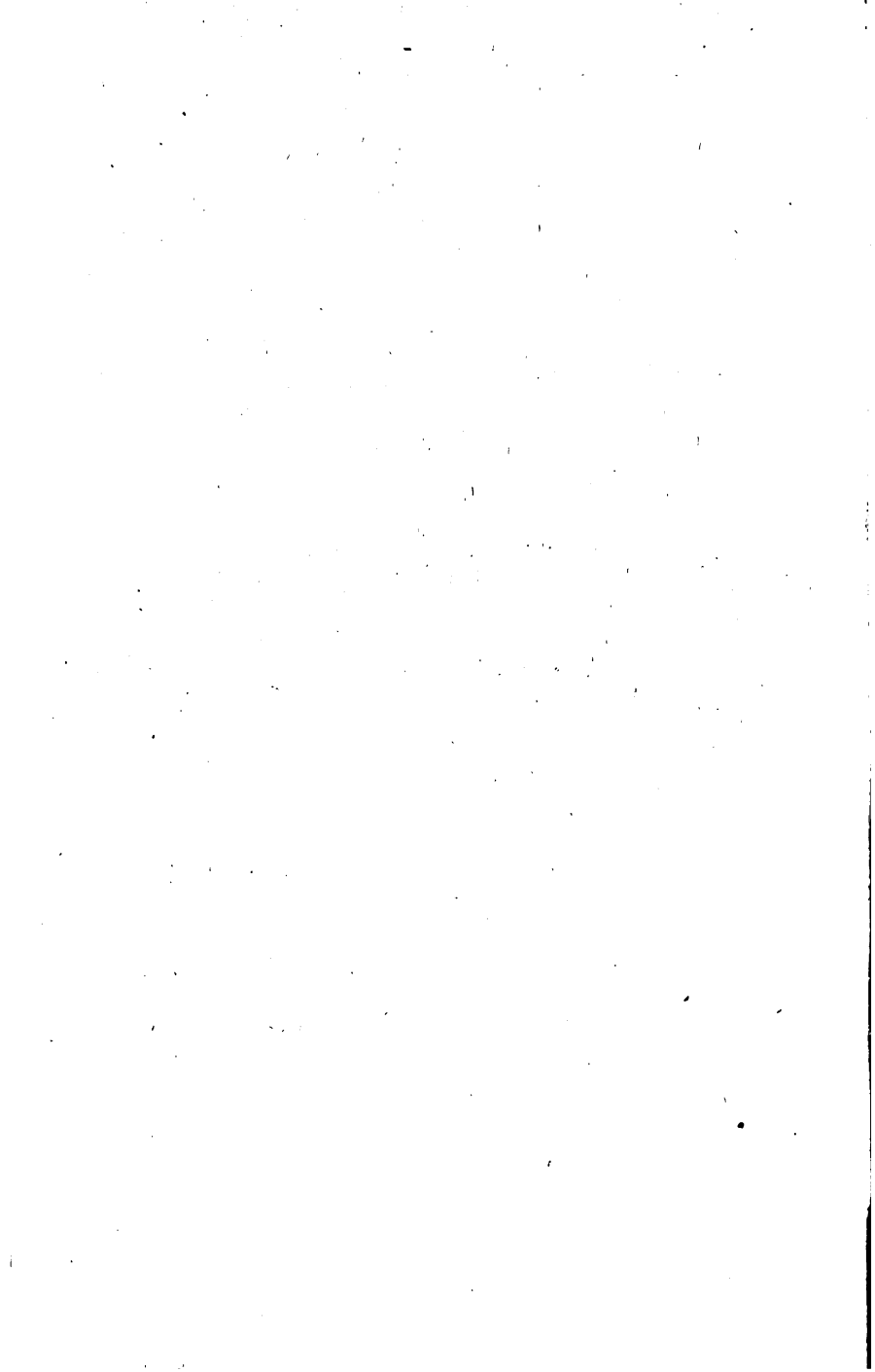


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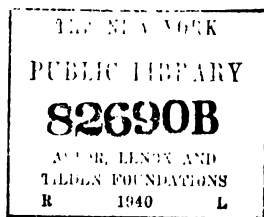
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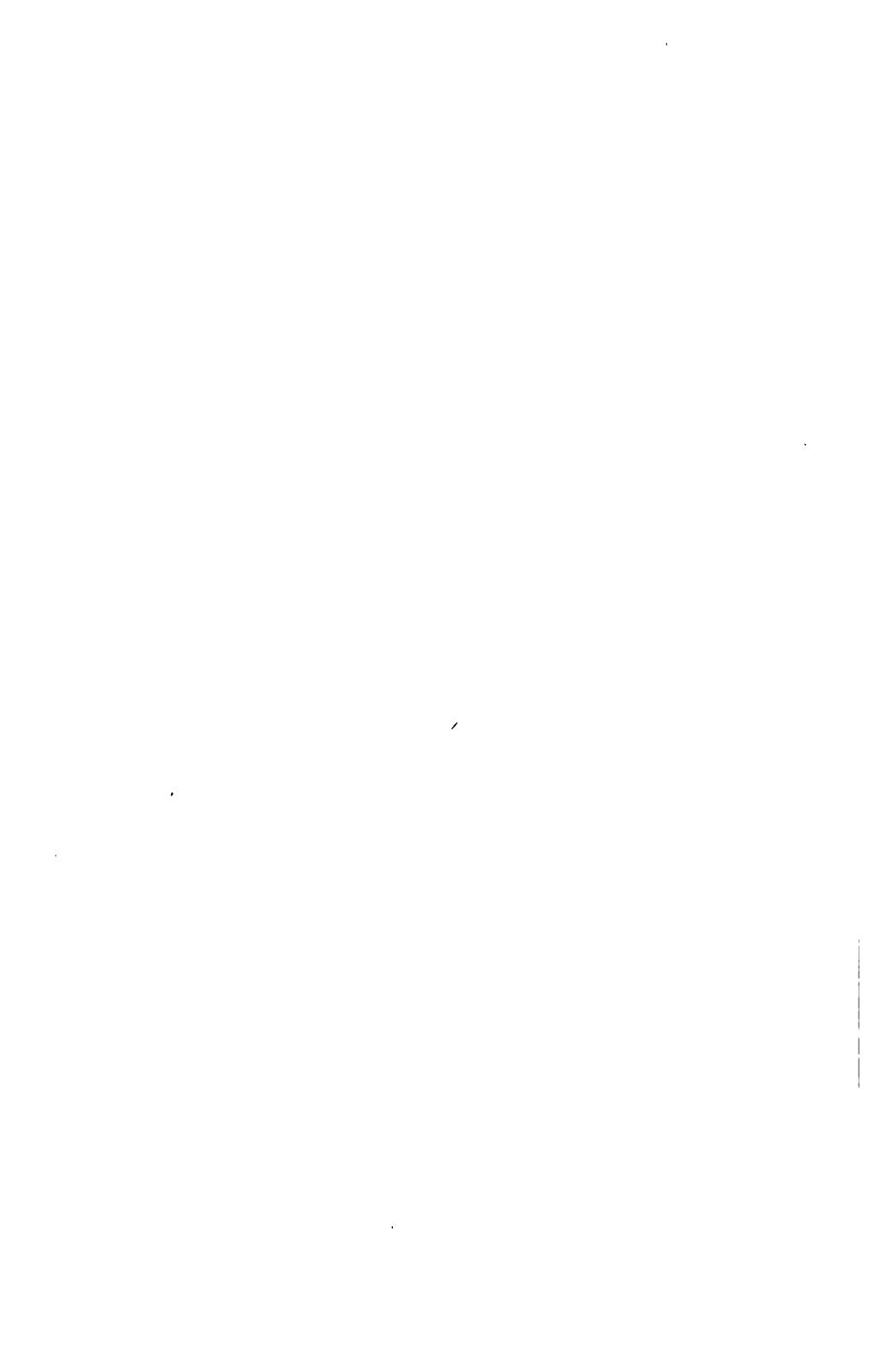
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CHAPTER I

"JOHNNY," said Lady Caroline Pountney, "I want you to take me down to Warborough House."

"Oh, I say!" said Johnny.

It was not that he had any solid objection, but the average young man of his set ejaculated "Oh, I say!" on every opportunity. And Johnny was a very average young man indeed.

"Do, Johnny," said his godmother, coaxingly. "Lady Warborough made such a point of my going. And it's so lonely here, in these wretched lodgings. London people are much too busy to spare a moment for an old woman with a sprained knee. I'd go by train, only I'm such a cripple." She broke off. She saw relenting in Johnny's gray eyes which had never been very obdurate. "I'll get ready at once," she exclaimed with alacrity.

"Well, if I must, I must, I suppose."

Sir John Holdfast resigned himself with perfect equanimity; rose and extended a broad, sunburnt hand to assist the lady in her effort to hoist herself out of her chair. He further supported her filially to the door, wondering as he did so, how any one afflicted with so

much difficulty in locomotion could hanker to find herself in the middle of a distracted crowd. It was fun enough at Warborough if you could roam the garden with a pretty girl; but, to be able to get Lady Caroline from motor to tea-room, and from tea-room back to motor, it was as much as the most sanguine could expect.

"You're a dear boy, Johnny," said she, "and I'll leave your wife all my emeralds when I die."

She turned upon him a rich brown eye, with so melting an expression that he thought she was going to kiss him; and he precipitately fled, explaining that he would just see if his *shover* had enough in the tank to tootle them down to Warborough, and that he would be back in a jiffy to help her down the stairs.

But the toilet even of an old woman with a sprained knee is apt to take time — perhaps more time, indeed, than that of agile eighteen. Young Holdfast had disposed of a considerable number of cigarettes; had gazed out upon the passing motors and carriages — quiet Clarges Street in the season has its aristocratic traffic — and, this pastime palling, had betaken himself aimlessly to his godmother's books. He had mastered the sporting page of the *Times* (sighing the while for a "Pink 'Un") before that good lady reappeared, radiant in nodding plumes of mauve and rustling silks of the same shade.

Such a toilet inevitably demanded the closing of the car; but Johnny resigned himself, with the unalterable placidity characteristic of him, and they set off in a humour to match the incomparable June day.

Lady Caroline Pountney loved smart, good-looking



young men. She loved Johnny with special affection besides — a childless woman's regard for the only piece of lusty youth that she might consider as belonging to her. As for him—well, the young man was not given to introspection; could hardly be said, indeed, at this twenty-fourth year of his life, to think much more than does a healthy dog. But if his reflections could have been analyzed, they would have been found to run in some such guise: "It's jolly lonely for the poor old girl, after all! And it's worth being stuffed for a bit to see her so awfully bucked up! . . . Daresay she'll hook on to somebody and let me get away. . . . Ripping to-day under the trees, with a pretty girl, strawberries, cymbals and all that."

The car duly wheeled in between the great guardant lions into the cedar avenue which is the most noted feature of Warborough House park. Sir John Holdfast, the crook of his cane to his lips, gazed contentedly out across the shadows of the avenue upon the golden green spaces beyond. A curve of the road brought them in view of the terraces and the noble pillared house. A vision bright with colour; from the stone vases blazing with geraniums to the delicate tints of dresses and parasols in the shifting crowd and the subdued glory of the rose arches against the green lawns. A vagrant gust of music caught his ear. He felt an odd stir within him; something like the tingle of excitement with which his blood was wont to greet the first cry of the hounds on a hunting morn.

Lady Caroline, reminiscing beside him upon her initial garden party at Warborough, rambled on unheeded:

"I wore white muslin, with a blue sash — so silly, being brunette, and *cerise* was my colour. But my mother would have it. 'There is only one dress for a young girl,' she used to say, 'and that's white muslin with a blue sash.' . . . I was just eighteen and quite lovely, dear! When my mother brought me up to Lady Warborough — that was the grandmother of the present man, Johnny — she just took my hand, and looked at my mother and said: '*Je vous fais mon compliment!*' And Dizzy was standing beside her, and he said: 'A Titian . . . dressed by Reynolds!' He did indeed, Johnny!"

"Oh, I say," said Sir John, "what a pretty girl!"

The car had drawn up below the terrace steps; and over the balustrade a face had looked down upon him as they swept past. He leaned out — the open window was on his side, but the face was gone. A flash of bright eyes, a smile of red parted, eager lips; a face delicate and pearl-hued, illumined by that smile. Honest Johnny, twenty-four, felt a little giddy as he flung his long legs out of the motor.

"Good gracious, child, what are you gaping at? Aren't you going to help me down?"

There was some difficulty in getting Lady Caroline up the steps to where the hostess stood with her smiling welcome; but Johnny accomplished the task manfully. Lady Warborough, tall, gracious, still youthful enough to be known as young Lady Warborough in spite of her grown-up daughters, received them both as if the whole entertainment had been planned in their honour. Lady Caroline was an old friend of the family; and Johnny

was a cousin — indeed, he was cousin to most people — and something of a favourite besides. She left her post a moment to establish them at the nearest tea-table in the crowded hall.

With all his mind outside on the terrace, pursuing “that face,” the young man resigned himself to the conscientious feeding of his godmother. When, however, this latter “hooked on” to one acquaintance after another, and yet maintained a firm grasp upon him, even his enduring serenity began to give way.

“No, Johnny, you must not leave me. My dear boy, you forget I’m a cripple — yes, Lord Hadersham, wasn’t it stupid? I twisted my knee at the Foreign Office reception, last month.” As a matter of fact, she had done the deed at Euston Station. But, if we are not picturesque in our social talk, where are we? “Agonies, agonies! — Only for dear Count d’Eichwald ——” (It had not been the ambassador in question but a benevolent porter who had picked her up; but let it pass.) “Yes, dear, I’m here. Isn’t it wonderful? My godson brought me down in his car. He insisted. . . . You know Sir John Holdfast? — Yes, poor Amy’s son; he’s got her eyes, hasn’t he? — Johnny, this is Mrs. Mauprat. . . . Is your girl here? Yes, do have tea with us. Johnny, bring that chair for Mrs. Mauprat.”

Johnny obeyed, but remained standing as if in absent-mindedness. His eye was upon the open doorway, measuring the distance for flight.

Mrs. Mauprat surveyed him a moment or two with an appraising glance. She was a hard-featured Scotch-

woman, the mother of a bevy of unmarried daughters and possessed a keen scent for eligible young men. While her hard eye roamed over the unconscious youth, her mind revolved. . . . "A fine old place in Yorkshire, a castle on the Border, and coal or something in Durham. . . . Where is that tiresome child? — I told her to keep within sight!"

"Sit down, Johnny," said Lady Caroline, anxiously.

Then Mrs. Mauprat spoke. "Yes, Caroline, I brought my second girl with me." She looked round, as if expecting to find her at her shoulder. "Dear me, what can have become of her? — Sir John, you are standing up; tell me, do you see any one with a white muslin and a yellow sash on the terrace? You could not mistake her: I am positive she is the only girl in white muslin with a yellow sash here."

"My mother always made me wear white muslin with a blue sash," began Lady Caroline with much unction. "The first time I ever came to this place, Dizzy was here. Dizzy was standing just there beside our hostess — he was still Dizzy then. . . ."

"Shall I go and look for your daughter?" cried Sir John with such alacrity that the harassed mother turned upon him, first with surprise, and then with a positively melting expression.

"Look for her!" exclaimed Lady Caroline from the midst of her reminiscences, with extreme tartness, "look for a creature he has never seen, in this seething crowd! — My dear Mary — I don't mean it personally, but what a wild-goose chase!"

"He can't mistake her," said her dear Mary, setting her countenance into lines of rigid firmness.

"No — I can't mistake her," echoed Johnny with extreme cheerfulness. "White muslin and a blue sash."

A scream of "yellow!" pursued him, just as a successful dive brought him out of range of his godmother's extended hand.

Negotiating the tea-tables and the blocking groups, he reached the garden terrace in safety. . . . "She can't run after me, poor old girl . . . and I haven't got a sash tied behind, thanks be!" He drew a long breath. "George, what a stew!"

He made his way toward that point of the terrace where he had seen the laughing face, arrested two or three times by the demure: "How do you do, Sir John?" of some ballroom partner, or a surprised: "Hallo, Johnny!" from some polo-field comrade. — It was characteristic that he should be Johnny to all men upon the shortest acquaintance.

The particular corner where the vision had flashed upon him was now occupied by a fat old gentleman and a fat old lady. Johnny caught a scrap of their discourse, as he paused to reconnoitre.

"Yes, the pigmies are in the summer-house; but I don't advise you to go all that way to see them, General. I have been and I can't say I think much of them."

"No, now, didn't you?"

"No, General —" firmly. "They're so very small." Johnny ran down the steps without a smile. He had

seen a large hat, wreathed with pale roses, beneath him, and plunged across the slopes; only to shy away, with a friendly smile, from the eager greeting of a Yorkshire neighbour's daughter. His behaviour was not unlike that of a dog seeking his master in a crowd — off again on a fresh scent, with a wag of the tail and a sniff of renewed energy. He passed the beguilements of the strawberry tents and the clashing appeal of the Hungarians; it was only when he reached the steps of the summer-house and met an amused stream emerging from the contemplation of the pigmies at tea, that he came upon the object of his search.

His honest heart gave a leap. If Johnny had been introspective, he might have reflected, and drawn conclusions from this singular portent.

She was standing somewhat apart from a group of laughing girls.

"No," she was saying very decidedly, "I don't want to go and see the poor little wretches. I always thought it very rude to stare at the animals in the Zoo at mealtime."

Her voice had a full ring that struck John Holdfast as extraordinarily different from any he had ever heard before; and its utterance was so clear and measured as scarcely to seem quite English, though there was no alien accent to be detected. Now that he could contemplate her at his ease, what struck him most about her were the black, straight-drawn brows, which, as she stood, frowning slightly, made almost a bar across the white forehead.

"Oh, but do come, Sarolta!" coaxed a rollicking looking maiden, whose complexion was not innocent of artifice, and who had an air of assurance that would have graced a drum-major. Johnny knew her well by sight: she was a niece of Lord Warborough — a recent appearance in London — but "not his sort," and he had successfully avoided making her acquaintance. "Billy Morton has promised to meet me up there; and he says he'll make love to one of the little wives. It is killing! The little husband gets blue in the face and jabbars, and wants to stick him with the fruit knife. — It's just too funny!"

"What would the little wife do, if you made love to the little husband, Eileen?" cried a companion.

"Oh, you make me sick!" cried Johnny's vision. She turned on her heel and set off by herself across the turf with a rapid free step. He noticed a flutter of primrose ribbon from her waist. Her skirt, too, blown back by the swing of her passage, was, he saw, of some filmy white stuff, that might well be muslin. Was ever young man so favoured by Fate?

As he strode after her, he was conscious of an increase of that remarkable agitation — mixed exhilaration, and something else. Not fear — Johnny had never been afraid — but a shiver in the blood, agreeable rather than otherwise, such as a fellow feels when he is about to meet a sporting danger.

At the sound of his rapid steps behind her she stopped and turned round. Johnny took off his hat.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered, while the colour

rushed hotly to his forehead, "I have been sent to look for you."

"Indeed?" A smile came into those luminous eyes that a moment before had shot such an unencouraging gleam at sight of his unfamiliar face.

"She told me I could not mistake you . . . that you were the only young lady with a yellow sash and white muslin."

"Indeed!" The girl lifted a fold of the diaphanous fabric that floated about her. "Are you sure she did not say *chiffon*? Come now, didn't she?—She called it *shiffong*, I daresay. So you thought muslin safer."

Safer! Could such a word apply to anything connected with this entrancing being! No delightful peril, not even the only steeple-chase he had ever won, had set his pulses quivering like this. He laughed inconsequently.

"Shiffong, of course, I should have said." He corrected himself in all innocence. She laughed—and Johnny was a lost man.

He became so absorbed in a hypnotised contemplation of the dimples at the corner of her square-cut mouth, of the adorable manner in which she contracted her eyes, of even the little wrinkle upon her short nose, that when she unexpectedly grew serious again, and asked him quite sharply: "Well, what does she want with me?" he was absolutely at a loss for a reply.

"If my aunt sent you after me," she cried impatiently, "I suppose she had some message?"

Johnny was on the point of explaining, surprised, that

he was the ambassador of a mother, not of an aunt, when the whole pitfall of the truth opened before him. He just saved himself from toppling in, by an unwonted mental effort. There were then, at least two yellow sashes at Warborough this afternoon, after all! How indeed could he have thought that such a creature as this might be daughter to Mrs. Mauprat? But he was not going to throw away the best piece of luck that had ever come his way for any paltry pandering to veracity.

"I rather think," he said slowly and solemnly, "she wanted me to bring you back to tea with her."

The marked disfavour of the "Oh!" with which this announcement was received encouraged him to continue.

"Tea," he repeated with emphasis, "in the hall over there. Such a stew as you never felt! And everybody talking together, and standing in each other's way!" His blushes had left him. "Your aunt," he went on, "has got hold of my old godmother — and once they've got you, they'll never let you go; they'll talk and talk and talk till it's time to go."

"I will not accompany you back to tea," announced the young lady with great formality and decision.

"I wouldn't," said the delighted young man.

A mischievous light danced in her eyes.

"You'll explain it very politely," she hinted. "Say I have had tea."

"Oh, I say!"

"What then?"

A bold and brilliant idea flashed upon him.

"Look here, do let me take you for a turn on the

lake. Oh, I say, do! It is jolly. There's a ripping canoe."

She hesitated, glanced toward the house, toward the straggling crowd; and then down the green glade where, between parted bushes starred with bloom, the waters glimmered. Then she gave a quaint nod.

"Hé bien — vogue la galère!"

He had small knowledge of French, but her compliance was unmistakable.

He helped her into the canoe; she laughed to feel into what a fragile bark she was trusting herself; and she had a little approving smile to note his balance, and the mastery of his hand as he wielded the paddle and pushed off.

Both were silent for a while. He brought her jealously away toward the extremity of the lake into a solitude of still waters, patched with dreaming lilies, bordered with overhanging willows, mirroring a glorious sky. She leant her chin on her clasped hands, and looked out across Johnny into some distance far beyond the lake horizon, her eyes dark with thought. Johnny looked at her. She did not seem to mind that. Indeed it would have required ultra sensitiveness to find objection in a gaze at once so guileless and so earnest.

Johnny was actually thinking hard — wondering who she might be, whence she had come. . . . Vaguely he knew that her speech was different from that of his compatriots. . . . She seemed on intimate terms with the Warborough set, if one might judge by the tone of the conversation outside the summer-

house. . . . How was it that he had never seen her before?

He was making up for lost time now — noting every detail of those pretty looks that had ravished him at first glance. Beauty it might not have seemed to another. But the most critical could hardly have denied the arresting charm of the girl's face; its singular vividness of expression; its unusual combination of refinement and vigour.

"A penny for your thoughts," he said at last.

She started a little; frowned a little, and then smiled.

"What would you do with them if you had them, I wonder?"

Her tone was not in the least coquettish; rather patronizing, such as the schoolgirl might use toward the schoolboy.

"I'd — oh, I'd be pleased, and honoured, you know — and I'd ——" What the dickens was a fellow to say to such a question! Then he beamed all over his good young face. "I'd take awful care of them, you know," he said upon a humorous inspiration.

She nodded at him amusedly.

"I'm sure you would — wrap them up in tissue paper perhaps — But you wouldn't understand them."

"Try me!" he cried eagerly.

She shook her head.

"No, no. There's a poem I read once that says our thoughts are birds that come and go. Mine are wild-birds — they fly where they like. Why, if I tried to catch one and give it to you, it would slip through my fingers and be gone, so far, so far!"

At her sudden wild gesture, the canoe rocked. "Above all," she exclaimed in pretended alarm, "do not throw me into the water. If you threw me into the water you would not know what you were murdering."

"Shouldn't I just?" he exclaimed with heat, and then sagely added: "I'd pick you out all right."

"No," she said, with a provoking look, "that's just what you might not be able to do. Oh, you might save my body, right enough, but not my soul! . . . Now I've puzzled you. Take me back to the shore, at once. My soul is too precious to be risked in a cockle-shell that rocks if one moves one's hands. Take me back!" she repeated imperiously; and those eyes, of indefinable colour, that seemed dark and light, as her mood varied, shot fire upon him now.

The canoe rocked indeed as he drew it to the shore and she stood up to spring out. He was not sorry for this, because he had to clasp her hand so closely; and even, at one moment, to fling an arm about her.

"Thank you," she said briefly. "It has been nice — and not too long to be spoilt!" She shook out her misty skirt, glanced down at a lichen stain, shrugged her shoulders; and, one foot poised on flight, gazed back at him.

"I don't even know your name," she said.

He lifted his hat:

"I am Sir John Holdfast."

Then her sudden laugh broke out again. "Holdfast?" she repeated, as if the name were a joke.

With that she was gone from him, running like a nymph

up the slope, leaving the echo of her laughter behind her. His impulse was to run in pursuit; but the habit of convention, a certain inarticulate sense of chivalry, arrested him. He went quickly enough after her, however, determined not to lose sight of the flutter of white and yellow. The flush which her mirth had called to his cheek still burned there.

Johnny lost all trace of his lady at last, in the conflicting stream of terrace and garden; but, conjecturing that under the impression he had mendaciously conveyed, she would be likely to seek her chaperon in the tea-room, he proceeded thither himself at a more sober gait.

Here unfortunately he was arrested. A nodding plume of lilac feathers became violently agitated; and Lady Caroline's piercing tones hailed him in accents of bitter reproach.

"Johnny, Johnny, Johnny — oh, Johnny!"

A score of amused faces turned in his direction; it was useless for the poor young man to pretend unconsciousness. Almost every one here knew who "Johnny" was.

"Hallo, Johnny," cried one of Lady Warborough's sons-in-law, "what have you been up to now?"

"Yes, indeed!" echoed his terrible godmother. She was reproachful, yet had lost nothing of her good-humour. "What has he been doing? Just look at his blushes! — Please bring him over to me, Mr. Penrhyn. You know I'm responsible for his moral welfare."

Society at play is very lightly entertained. Johnny

found himself the easy butt of an easy wit. David Penrhyn duly propelled him toward the table where the lame lady was still installed; and he seemed to consider the proceedings worth an immense amount of laughter.

"Sit down, Johnny," said Lady Caroline in resistless tones of command. "You've got to take me away in ten minutes; and out of my sight again you do not budge."

Johnny mopped his brow and cast a distraught eye about him. A blue frock, a green frock, a garment all over zigzags, another all stripes. Not a sign of the white chiffon with the yellow ribbon. He could have groaned aloud.

"Dear me, how odd you look!" commented his tormentor. "Mary Mauprat went off in a towering huff. Of course you did not even look for her wild goose. Barn-door goose were a great deal nearer the mark. I never saw such a plain girl in my days! Image of poor Mary!"

"I beg your pardon," said he vaguely. "Was there not a primrose glimmer yonder? Surely yes!" He sprang to his feet.

"Good gracious!" began Lady Caroline testily, then broke off. Her hostess was approaching; she was resting one hand on the shoulder of a slender white-clad girl, and smiling down at her as she came; and the girl was smiling back from under the shadow of a large, rose-wreathed hat.

"Help me up," said Lady Caroline. "I may as well say good-bye now." And while an effusive farewell took place between the ladies, Johnny had yet one

more delirious moment with her whom he only knew as Sarolta.

"You mustn't stop me," she said to him. "I haven't found my aunt yet."

"Oh, I say, let me help you.— What is she like?"

The girl stared. Then Johnny, realizing his slip, felt himself grow purple. She held him a moment severely under her gaze. The pupils of her strange eyes seemed to darken and brighten under conflicting thoughts; then, all at once, the compressed lips broke into laughter. Yet, even as she laughed, her movement away from him had a determined finality.

"No, no, 'pon honour!" he exclaimed, in a wild desire to retain her. "It was a true bill, I give you my word. I was sent to look for some one with a yellow sash. 'Pon honour!"

While she paused again, not unkindly, her gaze wandered indifferently beyond him; then lit up.

"Ah, there she is!"

With that unexpected quickness of hers, she had darted from his side as she spoke; and he now saw her seize hold of a stout woman whose back was toward them, and heard her cry "At last!"

The back view of Miss Sarolta's aunt was large and shinely clad. The front view, which was immediately presented caused the young man a sharp sense of surprise and disillusion. From the crown of her black head to the point of her toe-capped boot, his vision's "aunt" was unmistakably Jewish, unmistakably not a lady; more, she was aggressively vulgar. How had she

come to be included among Lady Warborough's guests? How, in the name of heaven, could there be any connection between her and Sarolta? But the check was momentary. Johnny recovered himself: what did it matter? Sarolta might have forty aunts in iridescent beadings, with shiny ringlets bobbing above drooping noses, she would still be, what she was — incomparable. He would be introduced to the aunt of Sarolta.

As he came up to them, he was aware that they were talking rapidly together, in odd guttural sounds that surely did not belong to French; nor, he thought, to German.

Upon his bashfully-uttered request, the girl, with perfect unconcern, performed the desired ceremony:

"*Töntchen*, this is Sir John Holdfast — Mrs. Mosen-thal."

A fat kid-gloved hand was instantly offered, which he shook with a cordiality increased by the knowledge of some quizzical eyes about him.

"Lovely, here, ain't it?" said the lady, meltingly.

The subsequent observation anent "the Marchioness of Warborough" was interrupted by the advance of that personage herself.

"I am sorry to say, Johnny, that Lady Caroline is going. You will find her at the head of the steps."

Sir John hesitated. A wild idea of offering seats in his car to Sarolta and the . . . lady was struggling in his mind, when that person fortunately spoke.

"Well, I'll have to be trotting myself, I suppose. Good-bye, Marchioness, good-bye, Sarolta."

"Aren't you going back with your aunt?" asked Sir John, disappointedly.

"No, indeed," said Lady Warborough, taking the girl's hand, and slipping it within her arm. "We are keeping Sarolta. We are going to have a great treat to-night, I assure you, Mrs. Mosenthal."

"Well, and I think you will, your ladyship."

Mrs. Mosenthal delivered herself doughtily, almost with a kind of defiance in her voice. Johnny was bewildered. Elementary manners forbade him to leave his lame old godmother one moment longer unattended. Moreover, he was obviously dismissed. There was farewell in Lady Warborough's smile; and a certain air about the little group of having private matters to discuss. Yet he could not forgo lingering for yet another word:

"Shall I never see you again?" he said in Sarolta's ear.

She looked at him vaguely. Then:

"I really don't know," she said, with a laugh. But to this cruel phrase added another — "Who knows? Are you going to Mrs. Morton's concert next week? I shall be there."

He had not the slightest acquaintance with Mrs. Morton but he answered bravely that he would "turn up"—and registered the vow, as he hurried back to his neglected duty, that no power on earth would keep him from that promised place of meeting.

CHAPTER II

MRS. JAMES MORTON, the handsome ambitious wife of the city magnate — whose father's name it was whispered had been Mordecai — gave handsome ambitious parties, which, winnowed year by year, had moreover become very select entertainments indeed. Mrs. Morton had wisely fixed upon music as the best medium for attaining social success; and her concerts were now reckoned among the season's events.

Music was not in Sir John Holdfast's line; and though, from April to the end of July, cards for dances were showered upon him thick as Vallombrosa leaves, nobody had ever dreamed of sending him a card for the big mansion in Carlton House Terrace. He had no difficulty, however, in obtaining the desired invitation. Young men in Sir John Holdfast's position rarely find any London door closed to them which they wish open.

He hardly knew himself during the intervening few days that separated him from the moment when he was to see her again. His dreams were haunted by her face; his waking moments were spent in futile endeavours to obtain information about her.

"I say," he would ask the most *répandus* youths of his acquaintance, "have you ever come across any girl called Sarolta?— no end of a pretty girl," he would add

in an off-hand manner that was belied by the earnestness of his gaze. "Eyebrows that meet nearly right across, don't you know."

Some were serious, and some jocular; but none of assistance.

"Might be Russian," opined the F. O. young man, in virtue of his superior knowledge of languages.

"Don't have anything to do with her, Johnny, my boy," warned an experienced Coldstreamer. "Eyebrows right across?— devil of a jealous creature!"

"Hallo," cried a third, sympathetically, "got it bad, old man?" This was an Eton comrade and a particular crony.

So Johnny dropped his indifferent air, and tapped himself ruefully over the region of the heart.

"In the bull's-eye!" he groaned.

He was almost the first guest to arrive at Mrs. Morton's; and vaguely holding the Japanese-vellum programme pressed upon him by a powdered footman, promptly ensconced himself in a coign of vantage to watch each arrival.

Many he knew — among them Lady Warborough, who swept in with the royal group. There were a number of pretty married women. There were some young men of the type he had himself generally avoided: distinguished *dilettanti*, who wore ties of which Johnny did not approve and their hair in what he called ringlets — which meant half an inch longer than his own thick, close shorn locks. There were at least three ambassadors and their wives: mindful of the F. O. youth's dictum, Johnny watched eagerly to see if any of these dignitaries

should be followed by the light, lithe figure that had taken possession of his thoughts. But vainly. There were indeed very few girls present.

After a while, to his disgust, he found himself obliged to enter the music room and take a chair. Mrs. Morton never had more guests than she could seat in comfort. He was imprisoned between two strangers and the music began.

Nearly every place was occupied; yet there was no sign of her. Had she only been mocking him? Had she changed her mind at the last moment? Was she, perhaps, ill? If he only could even get near Lady Warborough . . . but she was at the top of the room, beside the Princess. And, even when the first piece was over, Johnny found that you were not expected to move. He looked disconsolately at his programme: there were names upon it which (had he only known) ought to have made him consider himself privileged indeed.

Vaguely he surmised that the fat, pale-faced man, who played such a long, tiresome affair on the violin, must be "an awful swell at it." This other, too, who bounded on to the platform and looked round with fierce eyes, curling a truculent moustache before opening what Johnny thought the biggest mouth he had ever seen, was probably a no less distinguished personage; for he heard a murmur run round the decorous room, and when the song was finished, at least ten people in his vicinity remarked, "Divine!"

Johnny, in a deeper depression of spirits than he had ever known in his prosperous existence and tired of craning his neck toward the rose-wreathed doorway,

wearily counted the remaining "turns" he would have to sit through before he could escape. One more from the violinist; two more from the celebrated tenor; then a *quatuor d'instruments anciens* — whatever that might mean. And then, divided by what was apparently a pause, a Miss Vaneck was to sing three songs: "The Little Birch Tree," "Oh, My Heart!" and "How Do You Know?" by Sir Arnold Pringle, accompanied by the composer. . . . The names meant nothing to him but further boredom. Well, he would steal away in that pause. . . . No, he wouldn't, not while there was a soul left in the room; not while there was a ghost of a chance of Sarolta walking in.

Some people did evaporate: royalty having retired to supper with a dozen distinguished intimates, among whom, of course, was Lady Warborough. Meanwhile the commoner herd — if such a word could apply to Mrs. Morton's rigid selection of guests — partook of elaborate refreshments downstairs.

Johnny went with the rest, but was too cross to eat.

"Have you heard the new singer?" some one said near him, as he drank that glass of soda water which was all his injured feeling could condescend to.

"I hate new singers," said the man addressed, who was, though Johnny did not know this, the most distinguished musical critic of the day. "I should be off now, only I positively daren't — Lady Warborough would never forgive me."

"She's bringing her forward, isn't she?" said the interested lady, helping herself to a quail.

"She is — and two or three others. Oh, don't let's talk about it! I know what it will be. I'm sorry for Mrs. Morton — 'pon honour I am — to have to give us such a dessert after divine Barolo. Fact is, she had a crucial disappointment to-night — she expected Lothnar."

"Lothnar!" ejaculated the lady, in the awed tones of the lion huntress, pronouncing the name of an unattainable celebrity. "You don't say so: Lothnar! How could she get him? I thought he went nowhere."

"She didn't, you see," grinned the other; "there was a talk of his coming to London, and Costanza promised to try and bring him. Old Mordecai — beg pardon, Mrs. Morton — was ready with a thumping cheque toward those Frankheim schemes. It wouldn't have been bad business for Lothnar, but he never came over after all; changed his plans at the last moment. Poor Mrs. Morton had to fall back on Lady Warborough and royalty, and that entailed Lady Warborough's *protégée* — d'you see? That is how it is done: she daren't refuse, you know. Rather a brilliant idea, though, having supper in between; puts one in good-humour. Have some more fizz?"

"Oh, but Lothnar, Lothnar! To think that he might have been here!" sighed she. "Do you know, Mr. Christie, I positively made three pilgrimages to Frankheim to try and meet him? But it was all in vain. He lives shut up in that old house for months at a time, and every gate in the park is double-locked. And the gatekeepers — oh, the gatekeepers!"

"He's a rum devil," mused Mr. Christie.

Johnny went back to his seat, wondering who on earth this rum devil was, and why any one should be so anxious to meet him. Almost every hope of Sarolta's belated arrival had left him; but he was doggedly resolved to depart only with the last guest. If he met her again — he must meet her again — he would be able to tell her that he, at least, had been faithful.

He saw royalty reappear, benevolent and expectant; saw how Lady Warborough was again summoned to take her place at its side, and how animatedly they were conversing. Then, all at once he had, in the doorway by which the artists entered upon the platform, a momentary vision of a countenance that was, yes, unmistakably, that of Mrs. Mosenthal!

His heart leaped; he stared, amazed, almost painfully expectant. A lank young man ran up to the piano, spread some music sheets, and then ushered toward the keyboard a smiling, dapper individual with grizzled hair, red face, and pointed moustache, who looked far more like a retired cavalry officer than any one even remotely connected with music. This was, of course, Sir Arnold Pringle. He bowed genially, sat down, and the next moment it was Sarolta who walked quietly out of the inner room to the platform, and stood facing them all — Sarolta herself!

She was in white. Her dusky hair was tied back with black ribbon into a kind of girlish knot; she seemed even younger than at Warborough House and very pale. A sort of dimness came over Johnny's sight; when it cleared he saw that her lips were trembling.

The man at the piano struck a chord, and looked at her over his shoulder. She looked back at him and nodded. And then Johnny became aware that her hands, hanging down in front of her, were tightly clasped, and that, in spite of that, they were trembling too.

"She's frightened!" he said to himself. And only at that moment, so taken aback had he been by the unexpected apparition, did he realize that Sarolta was Miss Vaneck of the programme, Lady Warborough's new singer.

There is no denying the fact that it was a shock to Johnny. The connection with Mrs. Mosenthal, their presence at Warborough House, all was now explained. His nymph, his divinity, was just a girl with a voice, who was going to sing for her living.

But the next moment a high, clear note, something birdlike and sweet and piercing, rang out into the room; and Johnny was mentally down on his knees, asking pardon for that first and single instant of wavering.

When the song was finished, there was a moment's silence; and then the faint applause, which was all that the presence of royalty admitted. Johnny saw Lady Warborough turn a flushed face toward the exalted lady beside her. The exalted lady was nodding quite urbanely. But two rows in front of him the man who had spoken in the supper room, was shaking his head. And "for two pins" (Sir John Holdfast told himself), "he would have knocked it off his shoulders."

She began another song. This time the pure notes quivered. She was indeed frightened, poor child,

delicate, lovely creature, standing up there before them all, piping for their pleasure, all her hopes in life evidently hanging upon their approval!

Just in his own line of vision, Johnny beheld the anæmic countenance of one of those youths whose artistic neckwear he condemned, gazing up at the platform. He noted the expression of rapt admiration mingled with an odious condescension—admiration (as, with unwonted swiftness of perception, Johnny saw) for the young fresh beauty; condescension for the immature singer. A sudden fury leaped in his breast. If he had wanted to assault him who had shaken a disapproving head, he wanted badly to murder the owner of the eyes that leered, appraised and patronized.

“It’s no life for her!” he cried to himself, with a rush of tenderness, wrath, and chivalrous disgust. And the next moment, all the turmoil of the last days crystallized itself into a passionate determination. “It shall be no life for her. I’ll take her out of it!”

The audience, led this time by the good-natured Princess, applauded with a little more enthusiasm and Sarolta gathered sufficient courage to give the last song without that pathetic uncertainty that had gone to John Holdfast’s heart.

“She sings like a thrush,” he thought.

He sat on a moment or two, unconscious of the movement around him, in a condition which he himself would have described as “struck silly,” when he suddenly realized that the room was emptying, and that the one purpose of his presence here was unaccomplished. He

rose in a great hurry and went boldly up the length of the room toward that inner chamber into which the musicians had disappeared.

He stopped a moment on the threshold, the glance of his gray eyes flying unerringly to Sarolta, who stood the centre of a group. Her cheeks were flushed. He had thought her beauty was enhanced by her usual pallor. Now, thus incarnadined, it seemed to him adorned as if by jewels.

As he stared, he became conscious that many eyes were fixed on him: those of his hostess severely, of Lady Warborough with a smile, and of Princess Wilhelm with curiosity through her uplifted eyeglass. Sir Arnold Pringle had a shocked expression, and Johnny was vaguely conscious that, from a retired corner, Mrs. Mosenthal was gazing doubtfully upon him. But Sarolta looked at him not at all, and he could spare no thought to any one else.

"Why, it's Johnny," said Lady Warborough in a tone which matched her smile. "Sir John Holdfast, ma'am; may I present him?"

"Certainly," said the royal lady, very benevolently.

Mrs. Morton's countenance cleared as if by magic. Here, then, was no longer a hare-brained young man, audaciously breaking rules of etiquette in thrusting himself into the inner circle, here was one whom Lady Warborough called Johnny, one whose more formal title called forth a greeting of special blandness from a royal highness.

"You have come to congratulate the little singer," said the latter with a perceptible guttural accent. "I

was just telling Lady Warborough: wonderful — quite wonderful, in one so young — and beautifully trained.”

The look which accompanied these words included all concerned with practised urbanity.

“It was awfully jolly,” said Johnny.

Her highness smiled more broadly at this: then advanced a step, with the unmistakable movement of departure. There was an instant flutter; Lady Warborough, Sir Arnold, Mrs. Morton, gathered about the august one; a small, eager, black, hook-nosed man sprang forward from the outer room, summoned as if by magic by his wife’s imperious gesture to proffer his escort. As the cortège moved away, the Princess nodded a pleasant farewell to Sarolta.

Johnny drew an audible breath of relief on finding the coast clear.

“Oh, I say,” said he, coming up to Sarolta, “you were stunning, you know!”

She gave a little start and regarded him as out of some very far-off, entrancing dream. Then he saw, with a stab at his honest heart, that for a moment she did not recognize him.

“I am glad you like it,” she said formally: stereotyped answer to the expected compliment.

But, even as she spoke, her face lit up. Johnny only felt, without analyzing, the fascination with which light and shadow alternated on her countenance.

“So it’s you!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, it’s me,” he responded in his special language; and thought that, upon this, he might shake hands.

He took her fingers; wondered to find them ice-cold; held them.

"You never told me ——" he began, but his moment was gone: a loud, excited voice clamoured for attention,

"Sarolta! Here she is, madame." And Mrs. Mosenthal laid her hot clasp upon her niece's arm.

"Sarolta, Sarolta — here's Madame Costanza!"

A magnificent being in pearl-coloured satin, conveying, as she advanced, the impression of a ship in full sail, pushed the Hebraic lady on one side, and took the girl bodily into her embrace. Two kisses resounded like pistol shots. Still holding her then by the shoulders, she gazed into Sarolta's face with a pair of gorgeous, hawk-like eyes.

"You are a treasure! A mine of gold!" she cried in rich tones.

Sarolta had turned very pale. The glance she lifted was full of awe and ecstasy. Johnny saw that she was trembling again and wondered who this explosive Panjandrum might be who seemed to produce so much greater an impression on the singer than had a Queen's daughter.

"Yes, my child," went on the lady. "You don't know how to sing, of course, no — not for nuts, as you say in England. You don't know how to breathe. Above all, you don't know how to attack the note, *poverina*. You don't know how to phrase. Your voice is not even placed, to begin with. It is execrable. You have already a thousand tricks. *Mais ça ne fait rien . . . macht nichts. . . .* The gold is there — a treasure!"

At the first words of this ruthless criticism Sarolta

had winced as if the large, jewelled hand that gripped her shoulder had struck her in the face. From pale she grew a painful scarlet, and tears of intense mortification sprang to her eyes; she set her teeth not to shed them. But she was angry too. Behind those unshed tears her eyes flashed, and those level brows were drawn so fiercely as nearly to meet. Nevertheless, as the other rattled on, and appreciation succeeded condemnation, Miss Vaneck's expressive face lost its tense indignation, and quivered into bewilderment. And Madame Costanza proceeded as if these signs of emotion were quite outside her notice. There was no unkindness, though, in the keen glance that saw all — only a genial, if determined, purpose. She bore down an apologetic attempt at interruption on the part of Mrs. Mosenthal.

“And to think how little I expected such a discovery! These great ladies, with their little new singers — *ça me connaît!* They pick a linnet out of a hedge and call it a nightingale; set it twittering, and swoon with rapture . . . till the next linnet hops up!” She broke off, drew back, and flung out her forefinger. “Who has been teaching you?” she inquired, with an acute change of tone.

Obsequiously Mrs. Mosenthal answered, before Sarolta's trembling lips could articulate speech:

“The Marchioness of Warborough was having her taught by Sir Arnold Pringle, Madame Costanza.”

“Sir Arnold!” repeated madame, “ah!” The long drawn-out note held a world of significance. “And that was why you were trotted out to sing ‘The

Little Birch Tree,' and 'Oh, oh, oh! my Heart!' Tell me, child, do you want to go on with that kind of thing? Have you no better prospect than to be the little pipe for the little tunes of a Pringle? Oh, you might get an engagement now and again at a ballad concert, and at teas in Mayfair and make perhaps — perhaps fifty guineas a year at the height of your fame! That is your ambition, *hein?* And never to know any better than to run up to your note, like a sailor up a rope, quite pleased to get there, after all, *hein?* Is that your idea of art?"

"No," cried Sarolta.

She wrenched herself from the hand that emphasized each cutting question with a gentle shake. Johnny saw how her breast heaved with the sobs she would not utter. For the third time that day he felt murderously inclined. But Mrs. Mosenthal came to the rescue, with volubility. She could not say that she herself had been satisfied. But what was to be done? Her poor Anton — a great artist, if ever there had been one, as madame knew — had never had much opinion of Sir Arnold. And indeed the children had made great fun of those songs. . . . But he was fashionable, and the Marchioness had been very kind, and it seemed a chance for the child. And —

Once more Madame Costanza brushed her out of the way as if she had been a buzzing fly:

"Answer, you," she said to Sarolta. "Will you begin again? Will you begin again with me? I will make of you what I know you can be."

Sarolta leaned forward with parted lips; all her wrath

and humiliation seemed to have passed from her; she was hanging on the other's speech as if it held life or death.

"I will make of you," said the great one slowly, "an opera singer . . . of the first order."

"Oh!" cried the girl.

"There, Sarolta!" It seemed as if Mrs. Mosenthal, too, were hardly able to contain herself with the joy which this prospect offered. She began to weep between broken phrases in which the late Anton's theories, and Lady Warborough's aristocratic and absurd prejudice against the stage were comically jumbled.

But Johnny felt his blood run cold. It was bad enough to have her set up to amuse a fashionable party; but Sarolta, an opera singer!

"Well, *ma petite*," Madame Costanza pursued, "it only means unlearning and beginning again. But you're young. Bah! what is that? You understand. I take you to myself?"

She drew back as she spoke, reared her majestic figure, and placed that expressive forefinger in the centre of her chest. The hawk's-eyes demanded, "What do you say to such an opportunity!"

"Yes," she proceeded in a breathless silence, "I, I, Costanza, I take you. You come to Paris. I ask you no fees. I ask you nothing but to be a good child and do as you're told. And if you're not the best Isolde I ever launched, may I never train an opera singer again."

Johnny listened with a sinking heart, his mouth dropping open in dismay. He felt as if he were looking on at a play, as he saw the girl now seize Madame Costanza's

outstretched hands and press them to her lips; while Mrs. Mosenthal, her head inclined at an intense angle of sentimental rapture, clapped her fat palms and exclaimed incoherently:

"Well, Sarolta, of all the lucky! Of course she can go to Paris, madame. There ain't any difficulty about that. I'll go with you myself, love. No difficulty about that. I don't care what any one says, 'pon my word."

"*Allons, allons!*" cried the superb Costanza, impatiently but with good-humour. "It is settled then. I carry you off for an hour, *petite*. At the hotel we can talk. I leave to-morrow morning for Paris — the first boat. *Oh, là, là!* those boats! You can come with us now also, madame, if you like. I will send you both home in my taxi."

She caught Sarolta's willing hand, and tucked it under her stalwart arm. Then, followed by Mrs. Mosenthal, she rushed the girl with hurricane swiftness out of the door.

Johnny stood forlornly gazing after them. She had not as much as glanced back. She had forgotten his very existence!

Lady Warborough, returned from escorting the Princess to the hall, came in upon his solitude, and the expectant smile upon her face vanished.

"Where are they all?" she asked.

"They're gone," said he. "If you mean Sarolta — I mean Miss Vaneck."

She was too much struck by the matter of his statement to pay attention to the manner of it.

"Gone?" she echoed, frowning.

"Yes. Fat French woman" (most foreigners were French to English Johnny) "carried her off. . . . She is going to teach Sarolta singing — I mean Miss Vaneck."

"Teach Sarolta singing? But . . . but she has been taught. I've had her taught. Good gracious, Johnny, what's the meaning ——"

"Fat French woman said that was all wrong," explained Johnny with sullen air.

"Upon my word!" said Lady Warborough. The colour rose in her delicate face. Then the humorous side of the situation seemed to strike her; she laughed satirically.

"And where do I come in, I wonder?"

Johnny, as he marched back to his chambers through the empty streets, repeated the question forlornly; and forlornly answered himself:

"And where do you come in, John Holdfast? You juggins, you don't come in at all!"

CHAPTER III

THE crest of the Holdfasts was a "cubit arm" with a clenched fist; and their motto ran in similar canting manner, "Holde Faste." A legend was, of course, current in the family. But, without entering into the question of its authenticity, there was no doubt that they were an obstinate race, who, from one generation to another, thoroughly upheld the imposed tradition. Johnny, the last in the direct line of that sturdy stock, had certainly no idea of modelling his thoughts and deeds upon any conventional standard. Yet, in his modern way, he was no less stubborn than the far-off ancestor who had won name and preferment by the sheer strength of his grip, in holding his Northumbrian castle for Plantagenet. From the time of his childhood it went characteristically against nature with him to give up anything once he had laid hold of it. On the other hand, his desires were few, so that he passed among comrades as an "easy-going, good-natured chap." He let himself drift, very much in the ordinary way of wholesome young men, between an overwhelming amount of sport and a reasonable amount of frivolity. But his intimates gradually learned that his yea was yea indeed, and his nay, nay. So that a certain respect mingled with the jovial regard he was wont to inspire, and the "thorough

good sort" verdict universally passed upon him had a truer meaning than is usually the case with such commonplace praise.

For three days after his disappointing evening, Johnny moped about in a dissatisfied way very new to him. He went to a couple of balls and to some races, and derived about as much pleasure from them as an acutely dyspeptic man from a series of good dishes. Other fellows' jokes could not produce a smile; the company and conversation of the girls he generally liked were almost more than a bore. He could not muster a stir of enthusiasm for the best race of the day; he dropped his cigars half finished, and turned from champagne to whisky and soda.

On the morning of the third day, however, he awoke and found a certain decision formed in his mind, before which the clouds melted away, and life stretched once more cheerfully in front of him. He whistled over his dressing, partook of an excellent lunch at the club, and, at the earliest conventional visiting hour, presented himself at Lady Warborough's house in Belgrave Square.

He was received by that charming woman with her usual affability; but upon the immediate exposition of his purpose, a shade of stiffness, not unaccompanied by doubt, came over her.

"Miss Vaneck's address? — She's left London." Then the lady added, in the reserved tone that cloaked unspoken disapprobation: "I'm not likely to hear any more of her, Johnny; she has placed herself entirely in Madame Costanza's hands."

"Fat French woman!" commented Johnny thoughtfully.

"She is large, certainly," said the other smiling. "But not French — Austrian, I fancy. Anyhow, she is the great operatic trainer, and I understand Miss Vaneck has been led to look upon herself now as a rising operatic star."

"Oh, I say!" said Johnny, in a non-committal way. He was sharp enough to notice the underlying streak of bitterness in Lady Warborough's well-bred tones. But her information was scarcely news to him; he had gathered as much in Mrs. Morton's Rose-du-Barry anteroom on the fateful night.

"My sister and I," said Lady Warborough, "had made ourselves responsible for the child's training. My sister, Selina Dorien, you know, first came across her, through Mosenthal, Augusta's violin master. Sarolta was some kind of relation of his, a distant one — in fact, I believe Mosenthal's mother and hers were cousins, both Poles — I don't know what her father was. But she was left destitute, and they took her in, and brought her up with their own brood. Extraordinarily charitable these artists are! Mrs. Mosenthal had a dozen of her own already."

"Mrs. Mosenthal," echoed Johnny, profoundly attentive. "That's the Jew aunt!"

"I suppose they are Jews," said Lady Warborough indifferently. "Not Sarolta, though. Poor Professor Mosenthal was very proud of that strain of Polish blood, I believe. Well, my sister used to have her to sing with Augusta. And when Mosenthal died, we

decided to come forward and help them. We did everything for Sarolta — she was quite a pet of mine.” Lady Warborough paused, swallowed down a rising bitter phrase, and proceeded with a return of her chilly, detached air: “Mrs. Mosenthal is taking a great responsibility. I am afraid she is dazzled by the idea of a second Melba and millions, of which she will have her share. Sarolta is much too pretty, much too fragile, and I must add, I fear, much too headstrong — poor child — for such a life.

“A jolly rotten lot, I suppose,” Johnny chimed in, trying to conceal the agitation in which these words threw him.

“Of course, Selina and I never dreamed of, never would have permitted, anything but concert singing for her. It’s just what she is fit for, in my opinion — and indeed in Sir Arnold’s — and so we told her. I sent for Sir Arnold — poor man, he was much annoyed, and no wonder. But we might as well have talked to the wall. Sarolta came here, I must tell you, ostensibly to ask my leave for her new career, but really to inform me of her intentions. Anything more determined — backed up by Mrs. Mosenthal, of course — well, one must not expect gratitude. To think,” added Lady Warborough musingly, “that I actually contrived — oh, my dear Johnny, after endless difficulty — in arranging such a splendid début for her, only to this end! — Well, well, I must not think any more about her, I am done with her.”

“But I’m not,” said Johnny to himself. “I suppose,” he said aloud, “she’s got her in a school, or an academy

— whatever they call it over there — in Paris, this Madame — fat French woman?"

"No doubt she attends her classes," Lady Warborough said wearily.

She had made her complaint; and after all, the subject did not warrant prolonged discussion. A new aspect of it, however, seemed to strike her; she gave Johnny a searching look from limpid gray eyes:

"You take an extraordinary interest in Miss Vaneck, young man. Where have you known her, may I ask, and how long?"

Johnny blushed, but he boldly returned the lady's quizzical glance.

"I do take an interest in her," he said, neglecting the questions. "The fact is ——" He hesitated. His companion's gaze was becoming more amused and less disapproving. Lady Warborough had successfully married all her daughters.

"I say," he proceeded lumberingly; "you will think me no end of a fool, Cousin Vera, but the fact is I have never seen any one I liked in that way before. And I know I never shall again. I want to marry Miss Vaneck."

"Good heavens!" she ejaculated, startled out of her composure.

"Seems jolly quick, I know, and all that," he went on, "but I've got to do things in a bit of a hurry, now, haven't I, to keep them from putting her on the stage?"

"You can take a little time for reflection," said the other with gentle irony. "She won't appear this season

you know — nor for many seasons to come. My dear Johnny!" Laughter overcame her. Then, contemplating his serious countenance, she strove for gravity. "How old are you, may I ask? You were of age last year or so, weren't you?"

"I am twenty-four," said Sir John Holdfast firmly.

"Dear me," said Lady Warborough. "And I understand you to say this is your first love. Well, Johnny, my advice is: wait for your third."

"That nice boy," she was thinking, "he has not got a mother, or a sister, or any one to protect him." She was silent, revolving the situation.

"Thank you awfully," said Johnny irrelevantly, rising and holding out his hand. "I'll have to be off now; I'm afraid I've been a bore."

"Wait a minute," said she, retaining his strong hand in hers. "Warborough and I have been planning a cruise in the yacht, ending up with Cowes, you know. Won't you join us, Johnny? Warborough will be delighted."

Johnny pumped her hand up and down.

"It's awfully good of you," he said gratefully. "Afraid I can't, though. I'm going to Paris, Cousin Vera," he went on, his bold, clear eyes defying the scarlet on his brow. "I say, would you mind giving me the Jew lady's address?"

"Certainly, I should mind!"

Lady Warborough's cheeks were flushed too. She was holding herself very erect, and she had dropped Johnny's fingers.

"Oh, well, it does not matter — she's in Paris, anyhow. I'll run that Madame Costanza down in a jiffy, I expect."

He went to the door, and paused to look back with a good smile, just to show he bore no malice, and departed in evident high spirits.

"That nice boy — that nice boy! What a pity!" repeated the great lady to herself, staring regretfully at the closed door.

CHAPTER IV

JOHNNY's search was not, however, conducted altogether with such ease as he had anticipated. Madame Costanza was soon enough "run down," as he said, and he obtained an interview without any difficulty. But when she found the nature of his errand, he was treated to the most profitless and unpleasant ten minutes that he had ever known.

The hawk's-eyes were flashed upon him; the lady's forefinger was flung out with dramatic directness.

"And what do you want with her — with this Miss Vaneck?" demanded madame of him.

Johnny jerked back his head resentfully. What business was it of this fat French woman what he wanted with Sarolta Vaneck? What business was it of anybody but just of Sarolta and himself? But on second thoughts he realized that perhaps it was just as well the lady should look after the interests of her pupils — especially in the case of such an uncommonly pretty girl. Accordingly he smoothed the anger from his face, and, after that rebellious pause, answered cheerfully stammering:

"The fact is I've come to Paris to ask Miss Sarolta if — to — well, to marry me."

The extended finger dropped; the splendid flashing eyes passed from the fire of anger to coldness of contempt.

"*En vérité!*" said madame, in tones of high satire. "You're already on such terms with Miss Vaneck — Indeed! And yet you want her address?"

"I — I —" the young man stammered. He hardly knew what she was striving at, but it was surely something "jolly nasty." Yet how could he explain his ignorance of the beloved's movements, the extraordinary scantiness of their acquaintance?

"*Alle jeune homme!*" said Madame Costanza, and she indicated the door with a dramatic sweep of the arm.

Lady Warborough, too, had called him "young man," but it had not been in such a tone as this. Furiously it broke upon Johnny that while Lady Warborough seemed to deprecate his project as unwise for himself, Madame Costanza regarded him as threatening some harm to her pupil. What harm! It was very unusual for Johnny to turn pale, but he did so now from sheer wrath.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed, then dived for his hat.

What was the good of speaking to any one capable of such a suspicion. It was just like a French woman, he told himself.

Before he reached the door, a final remark of the lady's struck his ear:

"I admire your audacity," she was saying. "You come to me — to me — to assist you."

"I am very sorry I did," said he in honest indignation.

"I don't doubt it," she answered him. "*Ah, mais* — it was a little too much to expect, wasn't it? Only an Englishman would have had the front! . . . "

It was certainly only an Englishman who would have

left her, as Johnny did, without even an attempt at explanation.

Yet, as he went along the Boulevard St. Germain, where was situated Madame Costanza's well-known residence, *entre cour and jardin*, a sudden awful qualm seized him — What would the woman say to Sarolta? And then he was conscious that he had made a conspicuously false start.

It was all the more necessary that he should find Miss Vaneck without delay. The means he employed to attain this end were artless but effectual. He merely patrolled the western end of the Boulevard St. Germain from the earliest likely hour, the next morning. And in the group of businesslike young women with music rolls under their arms who presented themselves at the great teacher's house shortly after ten o'clock, Sarolta herself duly appeared, escorted by Mrs. Mosenthal.

Mrs. Mosenthal had an obviously French bonnet poised on the exuberant black curls. Sarolta, in a cool-looking Holland coat and skirt, and a simple, shady hat, made an astounding and delightful contrast. He was glad to remember that, although she chose to style her "aunt," Sarolta's relationship with the "Jew lady" was not that of blood.

His first impulse was to cross the street with outstretched hands. But he had time to reflect, and he warily told himself that if Madame Costanza had had the opportunity to misrepresent him he might very well be repudiated on her doorstep, and have added mistake to mistake. He had the strength of mind, therefore, to

turn his back and stroll away up the Boulevard, gave himself half an hour on the Quays, and returned.

By and by Sarolta emerged from under the lofty *porte cochère*; this time in company only of a scholar-companion. Johnny — dogged, yet scarlet with shame at his proceeding — followed the unsuspecting couple till they parted at the corner of the Rue de la Harpe; when Sarolta flew on alone with light step up the *banale*, modernized street and disappeared through the side-door of a little frame-maker's shop.

Johnny's heart thumped as he followed, after a sufficient pause, and, although the door was open, rang the bell.

He asked for Madame Mosenthal upon an instinctive impulse to demonstrate the straightness of his purpose. The pleasant maid, nut-brown, and sloe-eyed, clacked her tongue and was desolated to say that madame was out. Then, greatly daring, he asked for mademoiselle.

Promptly he was ushered into a small shabby room that had nevertheless nothing to shock a far more fastidious observer than Johnny. For it contained little besides a piano, a couple of armchairs, a music-stand, and a clock.

Sarolta, still in her pretty winged brown hat, was leaning with both elbows upon the lid of the closed piano, studying a piece of music spread before her. At his entrance she looked up, her bright face expressive of intense surprise.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, then straightened herself and flung the sheets of the music together. As she did so, a name largely printed in black on the title-

page, jumped at Johnny with an odd sense of familiarity — “Lothnar.”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed she again. The completeness of her surprise showed that Madame Costanza had held her tongue. At this moment he hardly knew if he were glad of it.

He must have presented a foolish spectacle, it may be supposed, for all at once she broke into laughter.

“You do remember me, then,” he said, gaining courage. She remembered him.

“Yes, you are the young man of the canoe at Warborough House. But I did not expect to see you here.” Even as she spoke, the light mirth vanished from her air; she drew her straight eyebrows together: “It is Lady Warborough who has sent you, of course. Now I understand. It is no use, no use! Nothing on earth will make me give it up — my vocation, my career!”

They were both too innocent in their youth to be conscious of the absurdity of such a suggestion. But here was Johnny’s opening. Looking back on it afterward, he said to himself he had been the silliest ass it was well possible for a fellow to be; that he had stammered and stumbled, and conveyed in the end hardly anything of all he felt and much that was blundering and misleading.

Nevertheless he could not give himself the comfort that it was his bashfulness only which had procured him so unqualified a rejection.

It was not that she had no love for him so much as that she had no love for anything outside that Art

(with capital A) which filled her every thought. All Johnny's wealth, the position that his name would give her, his two fine places, the pictures and the diamonds tempted her no more than did his devotion. She laughed at him first.

"You can't imagine how ridiculous you are."

Then she grew angry and demanded to know if he took her for a fool.

In his misery he uttered something of his horror for the life she was choosing; and then she fulminated:

"If you only knew what a fool you are!"

It was on this that she went back to her original suspicion.

"It is no use pretending. Lady Warborough has sent you after me."

And on his disclaimer, wrathful in his turn, she non-plussed him completely by the fierce question: How, then, had he tracked her? And how had he dared?

"I hardly even know you. I would not even have remembered your name if it had not been a funny one."

The young man had no choice left then but to pick up his hat in silence, even as he had done at Madame Costanza's, and take his departure. He could not, however, bring himself to leave her without a final word:

"Look here," he said, planting his card with a slap on the top of the piano; "a line to that address will always find me. And if ever you wanted me I'd come to you," added poor Johnny with an irrepressible click in his throat, "from the ends of the earth."

The girl, in her young hardness, smiled derisively.

And yet she was conscious of a faint, not unpleasurable, emotion, about her heart.

"You might want a friend, you know — you never can tell," pursued Johnny doggedly. And then he added, with a wistful air: "You cannot help my being your friend, you know."

CHAPTER V

"MES FILLES," said Madame Costanza, addressing her first morning class, that of her more advanced and promising pupils, "I have had a telegram from Dr. Lothnar."

All this lady did was dramatic. Like Mrs. Siddons, it would have been hardly possible for her to utter the most trivial words without giving them the value of a stage remark. But, unlike Mrs. Siddons, there was nearly always humour even in her tragic pronouncements. It was one of the reasons why her pupils adored her. She might (and did) fulminate wrath, affect despair, or scathe with scorn; but the keen hawk's-eyes, had always that saving glint of mirth, the good laugh was never far from the most thunderous outburst. The dramatic form in which life presented itself to her added enormously to its interest for those about her. Madame Costanza could thrill her listeners with the story of a salad. If she had come in upon her class this morning with the remark: "*Mes chéries*, the sun is shining," the hearts of those six damsels would have stirred in a manner no amount of splendid rays outside could have evoked.

Yet now, the teacher's mien, her grand voice of importance, and the gesture which accompanied it, were warranted.

The girls, who had risen from their seats with bright

smiles of welcome, stood transfixed. One turned very pale as with a sense of impending fate. The name of this girl was Sarolta Vaneck.

"Yes, my children," proceeded the singing mistress, after a due pause, "I have received a telegram from the great Dr. Lothnar — he is in Paris. And he says: 'I want an Iphigenia. Will call this afternoon to choose one of your Virgins.'"

A long-drawn "Oh!" ran from lip to lip: only Sarolta was silent. Madame put the blue paper back in her pocket.

"It is so," she said in tones of satisfaction. "He may try elsewhere — he comes back to me in the end."

She remained musing a moment; then went on:

"Do you know what it means, children? It means, for one of you, the chance of a lifetime. Pooh! What am I saying? It means a chance that does not come once in a century. . . . Believe me or not, Lothnar is one of the great geniuses of the world. Wagner? Wagner the precursor, I venture to say — Lothnar is greater than Beethoven even — because Beethoven is also only as a rung in the ladder. . . . You know what he has already accomplished, *mes chéries*? His inspiration is dramatic, but there is no living inspiration rich enough to collaborate with him. So he goes to those giants of old — to the Greeks! Across the centuries they meet . . . Æschylus, Euripides — Lothnar! The wonders of 'Prometheus' are still on every lip. The 'Prometheus' of Lothnar has cast fire upon earth indeed. Now, I must tell you, a tenderer but not less magnificent theme engages his attention, and he wants an

Iphigenia. . . . To one of you, children, to one of you, little ones, may come the glory of interpreting the new inspiration of Lothnar to the listening world." . . .

The speaker had a fine theme for her own dramatic instincts, and she gave them full scope. She paced the floor before her staring class; flung superb gestures broadcast; turned her flashing eyes heavenward, while her voice fell into thrilling cadences, impressive as a church bell.

Suddenly she dropped from her heights. Humour — slightly rueful perhaps — replaced her magniloquence:

"Only do not imagine that it will be all roses and laurels, my cherubs. Whoever is chosen, let the others say to themselves: '*Oh, là, là, nous l'avons échappé belle!*' We have had a fine escape from Lothnar's claws!' That Lothnar, he is not human! If you think you are going to be cosseted, complimented, made much of, as you are here, oh! it is you that will be mistaken! What he will want of you, he will get, if he has to grind it from you, if you have to give it with your blood, with your soul. And, if you can't give it — pft! That is the end of you as far as he is concerned; you are nothing — a cracked instrument to be thrown away. Understand that: the singers are his instruments, and he will have them tuned and pitched as he chooses . . . and then he plays on them. That is why he will permit no performance of his chief works except at the theatre he has himself founded, and under his own supervision. We have all had to make our pilgrimage to Frankheim to hear '*Prometheus*,' crowned heads and poor artists like me, all alike!

Now, Frankheim will out-Bayreuth Bayreuth—'tis I tell you so! And Lothnar — it is a Satan of hardness, obstinacy, pride — only he makes music like an archangel!"

With this encouragement, Madame Costanza proceeded to business details:

"Clare Voysey, and you, Isabelle, my good children, as the Lord has chosen to give you contralto voices, this is not for you. My friend, Dr. Lothnar, may be as mad as any genius ever was, but I defy him to make an Iphigenia out of anything but a soprano. Sady — Fräulein Hedwige" — she hesitated a moment, her glance resting on Sarolta — "you have had only a year's training, my child," she said kindly, "but ——" She paused again, and a significant smile hovered upon her lips.

Sarolta's heart was beating so fast that she failed to realize the encouragement. Between nervous apprehension and desire, she hardly knew whether the next words were delight or terror. "After all, he can only refuse you. Yes, I want him to hear you . . . it would be well he should hear you. You — and Marie too. *Un peu trop mezzo*, this poor Marie; but, temperament! You will all four come: Sady, Hedwige, Marie, Sarolta — this afternoon — four o'clock, if you please. My little contralti, I dispense with you for the day. Yes, Clare, should he ask for a contralto I shall not forget you, but you do not imagine you are a Clytemnestra yet, my poor innocent? No, I will not hand you round on a little dish — I know my Lothnar. *Parbleu*, he would be capable of tasting none of my cooking at all. Mesdemoiselles, we will devote the morning to singing each once through what we will serve

to the doctor this afternoon. The same songs, each of you — I have thought it over. 'L'Aria de Bach,' the 'Canzonetta' of Mozart. You have chance, Sady, with your facility on the trill. 'Elsa's Traum,' and the 'Waldständchen' of Strauss. It is a great deal. It is even too much, but do not believe that he will let you go straight through. I have known him stop a candidate at the first four bars of a song. I do not say this to frighten you — only to prepare you. *Allons, mes enfants!*"

Each of the four pupils left Madame Costanza's door that morning with the tragic conviction that never had they so disgraced themselves. The gay little American, Sady Schreiber, who had broken down on her best shake, was in tears, declaring that she could do it on her head at home, but that she knew she had not a mite of a chance, and vowing she would go to bed.

But Sarolta was silent, her teeth set, her black brows drawn. She was saying to herself, "I will succeed!" And an inner voice was whispering back to her, "You will be chosen." She knew that when she returned again along that street the violent beating of her heart would seize her once more — that her knees would be trembling beneath her, yet something in her spirit was slowly but determinedly rising to the ordeal. A sense of romance and adventure was stealing into her blood.

She had now been nearly a year and a half in Paris, and had much developed, as a matter of course, in experience and in many other ways. Mrs. Mosenthal had only remained with her long enough to see her firmly established in Madame Costanza's good graces; and this

latter lady had arranged with the well-to-do American pupil, Miss Sady Schreiber, to give her house-room and *chaperonage*. This word was not so absurd as it might seem applied to Miss Sady Schreiber; for, though only a few years older than Sarolta and remarkably pretty, she was possessed, as Madame Costanza knew, of a considerable shrewdness and knowledge of the world. Compared with most of her companions, she was rich; and though it was her whim to live the student life in as complete a manner as possible, she was able to live it with a due regard to comfort as well as picturesque effect.

Sarolta had never had anything to do with money matters, nor had she ever troubled her head with the thought of them. She accepted the state of affairs arranged between Madame Costanza, Mrs. Mosenthal, and Sady unquestioningly and without any sense of obligation; even as she accepted the fact that she must go in shabby garments while her companion went in daintiness; and that where Sady need never apparently deny herself the satisfying of a whim, her own allowance of five pounds a quarter had to keep her going in boots and gloves and, as far as possible, in clothes too.

But, though Miss Schreiber practically bore the whole expense of the *ménage*, she soon recognized Madame Costanza's wisdom in providing her with a companion. She grew enthusiastically fond of Sarolta. The arrangement was thus to the advantage of both the girls.

Sarolta soon fell in with the self-reliant student ways of her associate. She and Sady did everything together — walked to the classes, frequented concert and opera.

These months of hard work in a foreign land, away from the protectors and playmates of her childhood, had yet been the happiest she had even known. But it was the mere preliminary stage before real life should begin.

Now she seemed to herself as one standing on the edge of a great flood: the tide was calling her, to bear her whither she knew not. She must leap and plunge — and she would — with a high heart.

Madame Costanza, large and magnificent in velvet and fur, received her trembling pupils that afternoon in the hallowed precincts of her reception-room. This apartment, with its glimmering expanse of parquet floor, its superfine Steinway grand, its isolated groups of antique furniture and the celebrated collection of modern masters that adorned its walls, was altogether awe-inspiring.

The girls missed the familiar shabbiness of the classroom; and they were, moreover, conscious that, underlying their teacher's extreme jocularities, there was an unwonted and considerable nervousness.

Then ensued an hour of dismal waiting. Madame ceased to crack her jokes, grew restless, promenaded through the shining length of the room several times, drummed on the window-pane, shuddered at the fine autumn rain falling without, with such expressiveness that each pupil seemed to feel the chill to the marrow of her bones; and finally declared, in a voice of one pronouncing sentence of death:

"He will not come."

As she spoke, her momentary ill-humour passed. She

stood in the middle of the room surveying the disconsolate row, and gave a chuckle:

"I knew he had every fault, that Lothnar. But I had credited him with a single redeeming quality. Yes, he is a monster, I would say; but he has never kept me waiting. Well! What long little muzzles; and a minute ago your teeth were chattering. *Eh bien, quoi?* All is not lost; we will console each other. We will have a *concert intime*, and then tea. You will sing; I will sing. Sady, I have ordered little cakes from Rumpelmayer — *je ne vous dis que ça!*"

"Isn't she just adorable," said Sady to her neighbour.

So the curtains were pulled, the light turned on, and the dismal October afternoon was shut out. The piano was opened and Madame Costanza sat her down to it, beckoning up the eldest of her pupils.

"We will, if you please, begin with the aria of Bach, just as if that traitor was with us. Come, now, Hedwige, a bold attack, if you please."

Hedwige, a dark, sallow girl, with a lowering countenance which much belied a simple earnest nature, took her post at the piano and opened an immense mouth.

"*Une vraie bouche de requin*, that poor child! — I do not deny it," her mistress would say of her; "but, out of it will come something which will stir the world some day. And, besides, for the opera, who wants looks? We leave that to the music-hall, if you please."

So the plain Hedwige attacked her high note with due boldness. It was not often that Madame Costanza accompanied a pupil. But, when she did, it was as if

she were lifting faltering purposes with her two strong hands.

Hedwige sang; and her voice, in its extraordinary power, echoed and vibrated round the room.

The door burst open and a man rushed in as if propelled by a whirlwind. The singing girl, as she stood facing the door, was struck silent, though her great mouth remained open.

The three other pupils sat transfixed. Madame Costanza's hands fell off the piano; she wheeled round upon the music-stool, and screamed lustily:

"Comment, Lothnar? Lothnar! Is that you?"

One would have thought that seeing him had been the last of her expectations.

The man halted in his headlong advance, and made a flapping motion of his hand toward Hedwige.

"I asked you for an Iphigenia," he said in a grating voice.

"Hedwige, my child," said the mistress, in a sweet, sad tone, "go and sit down."

Then she rose majestically, and indicated her three remaining pupils with one sweeping gesture.

These two, Costanza and Lothnar, had not seen each other for nearly two years, and were good friends. It was a singular meeting; but the dramatic lady could adapt herself in the flash of an eye to most singular situations.

The man folded his arms, dropped his head, and from under bushy overhanging brows, flung a searching look upon each of the girls in turn.

Sarolta, whose heart had almost stopped upon his entrance, felt it steadying as she returned the great musician's gaze with an odd sense of defiance. She saw a tall, angular man, with features rugged, yet distinctly chiselled. Across a dominating brow, furrowed with three vertical lines of thought, a sweep of grizzled hair was tossed like a seaweed across a rock. The lower part of the face was half-hidden by a reddish beard that, forking, gave the countenance something of a Leonardo air; contradicted, however, by the wildness of a growth evidently little used to cosmetics or shears. From under the thick eyebrows, too, eyes looked out very different from those of the serene Italian genius. These eyes were unmistakably northern: pale blue, flaming from the shadow of those pent-house brows with an intensity so concentrated, a light so fierce and brilliant, as to give the impression of a spirit at once ruthless, certain of conquest, and not quite sane.

"Rise, young ladies," said Madame Costanza. There was a vibration as of quickened pulses, in her voice.

The three rose. Sarolta unconsciously stepped in front of the others. His eyes passed her; then flashed back to her. She felt as if her soul, a very small thing, were being wrenched from its secret seat of life; weighed, examined, turned inside out. He looked away again; it was as if it had been flung back at her, a worthless little rag.

"I will make Miss Sady Schreiber sing for you, doctor," suggested madame.

She beckoned to the girl as she spoke; and Sady ad-

vanced, white to her pretty lips, with a smile more nearly resembling the grimace of a baby about to cry. The ordeal was far worse than even her terrors had expected.

Dr. Lothnar hesitated a moment, then shrugged his shoulders, and flung himself into the armchair nearest to him so violently that it creaked again.

"Do not forget, my child," whispered the teacher, as she pushed the girl toward the piano, "that you sing as much for me as for yourself."

The other two sat down again; Sarolta remained standing because she lacked the simple initiative to move. She had thought her soul had been flung back to her; but now it was being drawn from her again, more slowly, less harshly, but with so subtle a power that she felt the defiance changing within her to some unknown sensation, as of a decline of her own personality, a giving out of herself toward something all-absorbing. Beneath the shadow of a lean hand propping his forehead, the master's eyes were fixed upon her.

Sady Schreiber's light, sweet voice, miraculously flexible, fell silent at last, after a silver-clear trill. Madame looked round in triumph. It was not every one who could render you Mozart like that!

Lothnar's hand dropped from before his face.

"I have heard nothing," he said abruptly.

"*Ah, mais, par exemple!* . . ."

"I've heard nothing!" repeated the man in loud overbearing tones. "Make that one sing."

Madame half rose from her music-stool; a flush of anger was on her handsome massive face. Her keen eyes

crossed glances with those madly luminous orbs of his, and there seemed to ensue a silent measuring of will. Then the lady turned back to her keyboard.

"Approach, Miss Vaneck," she said with an irritation she dared not let loose upon the genius.

Sarolta never knew how she sang.

"Quite execrably," madame told her afterward, in the same words she had used at their first meeting. Sady, on the contrary, assured her, with the loyalty of a comrade, and the pride of one who had suffered defeat, that it had been too lovely. Sarolta knew herself that her breath had unaccountably failed her, that she had gasped, as neither Sady nor Hedwige had done; that she had broken a phrase, and, only for madame's superb accompaniment had perhaps broken down altogether. But, apparently none of this had mattered. Something of the gold, perhaps, which Madame Costanza had discovered had shone and glittered through all these defects. Anyhow, before she had reached the end of Elsa's amorous chant, Lothnar got up, placed his hands on Madame Costanza's shoulders, and unceremoniously turned her out of her seat; then, sitting down himself, he called the girl to him with a single jerk of his eyebrow.

"Sing!" he ordered, striking a note. "Louder. Again. Again." Each time he spoke, his long thin finger struck.

Sarolta's voice rose and rose again, each time more purely, more strongly. Her cheeks were scarlet, her heart beating against her ribs; and yet, growing upon her

was a sense of strife, of exhilaration that was almost ecstasy.

"*Na*," said Herr Lothnar, dropping his hand from the piano, to address madame in German. "So well she has not studied, but something she has contrived to learn. *Etwas hat sie doch gelernt.*" He looked and spoke across the girl, ignoring her proximity. The teacher hastened to exculpate a favourite pupil.

"She has not had time yet. She has been with me only ——" He interrupted her with a ruthlessness that was somehow not offensive, so obviously did it spring from an intense concentration of idea and purpose.

"*Na*, it is all the better. I will the easier make of her what I want."

A stir ran through the room, repressed by the awe which the man's presence inspired in them all, including the doughty Costanza herself. So! Sarolta was the chosen one! Sarolta herself felt a sudden calming of her senses, but no surprise. Had she not known she would be chosen?

He sat awhile in silence, his blue eyes seeming to look inward and yet at something infinitely remote. Save for Madame Costanza's heavy breathing, there was no sound in the room. Then he struck a few chords and broke into a curious measure, now five, now six, to the bar. Into this presently came a phrase of piercing yet very simple sadness. It was not a phrase in the accepted sense, for it ceased without coming to a close.

"Heavens, how sad!" cried madame. "It brings the tears to the eyes!"

"And you?" cried Lothnar, turning the searchlight

of his glance full upon Sarolta, "what does it say to you? Nothing but that, *hein?* A wail? A drowning kitten apostrophizing fate?"

She answered him boldly, almost fiercely, as one determined not to be intimidated.

"No; it is sad, but it is strong. It accepts fate."

The man sprang from his seat with the energy that characterized all his movements. He caught the shaded electric light from the piano, and lifted it so that its full harsh illumination fell upon Sarolta's face. Resisting the natural impulse to blink and turn away, she followed that other curious rebellious sense and gazed back frowning into the eyes that scrutinized her so brutally.

"Who is responsible for you? Are your parents alive?"

"I am an orphan."

"*Desto besser!* So much the better." He laid down the lamp as he spoke and turned away. Once again the absence of any personal element in his remark prevented its callousness from being utterly unbearable. Silence returned to the great room. The man stood, driving his fingers through his forked beard, lost in thought. Suddenly he scowled from the sitting pupils to their teacher.

"Impossible to talk before these little frogs! We have to discuss things *unter vier Augen.*"

He spoke irritably, reproachfully. Madame Costanza hurriedly endeavoured to atone.

"Go, my children, go! We keep Sarolta, do we not?" She hesitated.

"Did I not say *unter vier Augen?*"

"Go, then also, my child," said, with her large patience,

the teacher of Sarolta. "You shall hear from me to-night, I promise you."

Sarolta demurred. Was she to be sent forth, and fate still hanging in the balance? She felt driven to question point blank, but this time courage failed her: she dared not.

Lothnar, still standing, flung a single look at her that drove her out of the door, as if his hand had been on her shoulder.

"Oh my! oh my! oh my!" ejaculated Sady, as she bundled herself into her furs in the anteroom, with a comical air of mock terror on her delicately quaint face. "The rockiest old grizzly that ever growled isn't in it! Aren't I just glad, as madame says, that I'm not in his claws!"

"I think I'll sit on the doorstep, and wait till he comes out!" cried Sarolta wildly. "Why should I be treated like this?"

"You'll do no such thing," said Sady, flinging her friend's cheap boa about her neck and dragging her to the door. "You're not going to play spillikens with fame and fortune! It's all very well pretending, but we'd just give our ears to be you — wouldn't we, girls?"

The other two looked at Sarolta askance, without replying. This sign of incipient jealousy comforted Miss Vaneck more than her friend's optimistic assurance; she allowed herself to be led homeward, along the wet shining street.

Sady only stopped once, and that was to groan aloud at the thought of the little Rumpelmayer cakes wasting their sweetness on Madame Costanza's untouched tea-table.

CHAPTER VI

HUMMING Elvira's sweet, prim "Lament," Sady ran gaily up the many stairs to their *cinquième* in the Rue Clotilde.

Sarolta, following two flights behind, her very feet weighty with thought, heard the twittering voice break into a cry, followed by an excited hail:

"Sarolta, Sarolta! Say — your beau has been here!"

She had a scornful smile as she emerged from the dimness of the stairway to the brightness of the top landing, where the incandescent light was of the crudest description. It illuminated something just now, however, worth looking at — a bunch of hothouse carnations and roses was tied on to the door handle of the little apartment. The close air was filled with the scent of southern gardens.

"Faithful Johnny, of course!" said the American promptly.

She disengaged the flowers and surveyed the card attached. As she had opined the inscription ran: "With Sir John Holdfast's kind regards." Underneath this formal dedication were a few words, apparently added at the door itself: "Sorry to miss you. May I call this evening?"

"Now, that's what I call being properly bunched,"

commented Miss Sady, dipping her little nose among the petals and drawing an ecstatic breath. "Not a wire in that lot, my dear. It's just as if some one had gone and harvested in a fairy bower!"

"Keep them, then," said Sarolta with indifference. "I make you a present of them — and of the donor too."

"Don't I wish you could," responded the other, with truthful accent. "My angel, wouldn't I just quit it all and settle down to domesticity and society — the cream of British society — with a thankful heart! I wasn't cut out for a career, and that's a fact; and I don't hanker to share any laurels with the grizzly that calls itself Lothnar."

Sarolta made no reply as she let herself in. She crossed their single sitting-room, bumping against the furniture as she went; fumbled for the handle of her bedroom door, and having entered, shut it behind her.

"Sarolta!" called her companion, surprised. But the only response was the click of a bolt shot into its socket.

"Well, I never!"

Sady deposited her flowers, turned on the light, examined the state of the fire, and mended it, and proceeded to make preparations for a belated and substantial tea that would serve them for an evening meal — it was part of her scheme of "glorious Bohemian freedom" that, save for the morning visit of a jovial Normande, they should live unhampered by servants. She next plunged the flowers into a jar of green ware, drew the curtains closely, and surveyed the scene with some pride.

She had chosen this perch, on the highest rise of the hill of St. Geneviève, the loftiest point of that quarter of decayed colleges and *couvents extincts*, known in older days as l'Université, after much search and deliberation. The house had its front on the wide stone-flagged Place du Panthéon — perhaps the most deserted, most dignified, and delightfully silent spot in ancient Paris.

Having duly furnished the low-ceiled, rambling suite of *mansarde* rooms, she had found an ever-increasing satisfaction in their ownership. To begin with the view they had from under those zinc-covered eaves! There was not — except from some church steeple — such a wide and free one in all Paris, she would declare.

And certainly there was something in the statement. The three small dormers of their sitting-room gave over a fine perspective of the Panthéon Dome on the right, of St. Étienne du Mont's mediæval spires on the left; and, beyond the brown roofs, sloping down to the east, sundry centenary trees of the Jardin des Plantes raised waving evergreen tops. Sady would point you out the noted *cèdre du Liban* with a proprietary air.

And from their bedroom *lucarnes*, at the back, you could please yourself with a vision of the twin belfrys of Notre Dame; and beyond, the bold outline of St. Jacques on his tower, or beyond again, the pearl-gray roofs of the Louvre; or beyond all, toward the sunset, the misty-green outline of Argenteuil Hills — not to mention that in some afternoon hours the great pile of Montmartre's Sacré Cœur, white, sad, and aloof, would fling back from its *rosace* windows glints of sunshine,

golden or carmine. The rooms were different indeed from the close sullen lodgings of the Rue de la Harpe.

Sady had taken an artist's pleasure in furnishing with quaint and antique simplicity. The carved-oak bench and chairs, the fifteenth-century *bahut*, and the rest of it had cost her a good deal, though Sarolta thought that things nearing, as these did, the verge of decay must have been bought for the sake of economy.

Even if her own exiguous means had allowed her a choice in the matter, the younger girl's disposition would have made her shirk any of the duties of the *ménage*, including the more agreeable one of adorning the habitation. She was profoundly indifferent as to what she ate and drank, whether she lay soft or no. Sometimes, indeed, absorbed in her dreams, she would scarcely perceive if it were warm or cold about her, and would let the fire out, to her comrade's fury. She took her life with Sady as a matter of course, with all its pretty refinements; much as she had taken the noisy, scrambling, hand-to-mouth existence with the Mosenthals, or the luxury of her visits to Lady Warborough.

To Sarolta the only thing that mattered was that inner life of hers, vivid, ambitious, shot with wonderful fancies and stimulated by relentless work.

So it may be said that Miss Schreiber was the presiding genius of this quaint students' dwelling in the Rue de Clotilde.

Having duly contemplated the effect of the branching roses over the embroidered tablecloth, set with the cups

of *pâté tendre* which had been her most recent purchase, she next made the tea, and then called lustily upon her companion.

"I'll come presently," was the answer extracted at last, as from a long distance.

"I expect you're qualifying for an assistant grizzly," cried Sady with cheerful tartness.

She sat down herself, but somehow could muster no appetite without the usual companionship. And once again she shouted:

"Do come, Sarolta! It's real mean of you to shut yourself off. Sarolta!"

The door burst open, and Sarolta stood irate and blinking on the threshold.

"Can't you leave me a moment in peace?"

The indignant retort which was rising to Sady's lips fell silent; she had caught sight of her companion's face.

"You've been crying! Why, honey, what is it?"

The other stiffened herself against the loving arms flung about her, against the dear tenderness of the voice; but the next moment she was weeping aloud, pressing close to the little comrade's breast, feeling the thin embrace tighten around her, and drawing a comfort from it that yet in an odd way added to the poignancy of the ache at her heart.

"Tell me, honey! Tell her own Sady! My blessed lamb, don't sob so!"

"I don't know," gasped the other. "Oh, Sady, hold me — I'm frightened!"

"My blessed! — It's the horrid bear! There, you shan't go with him. Why should you go? I'll tell Madame Costanza myself. Good gracious! Nobody can make you go, darling."

She broke off abruptly, for, with a vigorous movement, Sarolta had pushed the consoler away.

"Not go!" she was laughing in scorn, though the tears stood on her hot cheeks. "Not go? Oh, Sady, how silly you are!"

"Then, why are you crying, miss?"

Some slight show of exasperation in such circumstances may be permitted even to the most easy temper.

"Because I am silly, too, I suppose," said Sarolta succinctly. "Oh, no, don't ask me to explain. I might talk till Doomsday, and you'd never understand!"

She sat down, fell hungrily enough upon a crisp *petit pain*, and pushed her cup toward the teapot.

Swelling with indignation, Sady performed the desired office, dropping the sugar and measuring out the milk with the air of one who wished it to be understood that she will not lightly presume again. But a minute had not passed before Sarolta's hand stole across the table toward her.

"Oh, dear!" cried the placable American, and her bright eyes became suffused in her turn—"What shall I do without you?"

"You'll have to come too — that's all," cried Sarolta.

The sense of oppression had gone from her. She grew gay — almost recklessly so.

In the middle of her second roll she sprang from the

table, breaking off her excited chatter, to rush to their little bookcase.

"Who was Iphigenia? Haven't we got anything Greek here? Sady, is it possible that you are so utterly lost to culture as to have nothing Greek on our shelves?"

"Well," said Sady plaintively, stirring her tea, "I got you all the Norwegian myths, and two lives of Wagner, only last month, Sarolta, and ——"

The shrill summons of the door-bell, incongruously followed by a discreet tapping, interrupted her.

"My message!" cried Sarolta.

She flew out of the room, and was heard wrenching the bolt. A disappointed ejaculation and the murmur of a manly voice followed; and Sady laughed as Sir John Holdfast walked meekly in, following the openly disgusted Sarolta.

"Well, now!" exclaimed Miss Schreiber, "if you have not come in the very nick of time!"

The newcomer's face, which had been the picture of discomfiture, brightened perceptibly at the words. Miss Vaneck sat herself down again to her abandoned tea in sullen silence.

Johnny was more than a year older, but nobody would have given him the credit of it. Only an acute observer might have noticed certain new lines of determination about the mouth, and an increased directness and steadiness of gaze. He might seem as boyish and blundering as ever; yet within him was the man who knew his own mind.

"I'm glad to hear that, Miss Sady," he said. "Won't you shake hands?"

Sady tipped her little fingers in friendly fashion into the big clasp offered to her. During the months of her joint life with Sarolta this adorer of her friend's had become a familiar personality; from which it will be seen that, in spite of the uncompromising rejection of his addresses, Sir John Holdfast had contrived to establish himself at least on an intimate footing with the object of his adoration.

Sometimes a simple straightforwardness of method, backed by an undeviating purpose, will accomplish its end where the utmost tact might fail. Before the young man had reached the end of his disconsolate homeward journey, after that first unsuccessful visit to Paris, he had told himself that the parting need not be irrevocable, even if her decision should be so. There was no reason why he should not at once endeavour to start the friendship he so earnestly offered her. It would be, at any rate, a step in the right direction.

And, after all, this modest ambition he found not too difficult of realization. Sarolta had never been brought up to conventional ideas of prudery. Sady hailed from a country where the very respect which surrounds the young girl precludes any thoughts of the precautions rife in less chivalrous countries. And, from the first, Sady liked Sir John. Though quite realizing the hopelessness of his case, she could not help admiring in a feminine way the indomitable perseverance with which he appeared with his offerings of flowers, opera tickets, motor drives,

and the like. She admired, too, the guarded courtesy of his attitude toward two girls, ready in Bohemian fashion to take the fun he offered them.

Though Johnny's "friendly" visits to Paris, after a duration of between five to seven days (according to the frequency of Sarolta's smiles), invariably ended in a proposal, he had never once presumed beyond a manner which would have been becoming to the courting of the best-chaperoned young lady in England.

Sarolta dreamily enjoyed the fragrance and beauty of her admirer's flowers, ate his sweets, revelled in the opera boxes, and found the motor drives stimulating; but it was Sady who appreciated the chivalrous fashion in which the Englishman offered all these good things. "Real grit," she called him; and something more.

She provoked Sarolta's contemptuous mirth on one occasion by referring to him as a kind of Knight of the Round Table; and her furious indignation by actually pleading his cause. For that lapse she had been ever after humbly apologetic. Was not Sarolta set apart, being marked for Art (with a big A), and for a Career (with a big C)? Was she not given to the world for its joy, and was it not to give her in return undying glory?

Sarolta's belief in herself and in her vocation was not only shared by her friend, but encouraged by Madame Costanza herself. Yet even, in spite of such ambition for her favourite, and the fact that she was a very dragon of propriety in aught that concerned her pupils, Johnny had contrived to conciliate this redoubtable lady.

Reassured that the youth was no gay Lothario — reassured besides, that he was not likely to tempt Sarolta from the lonely path of high achievement, she had come to regard Johnny's periodical visits as quite agreeable diversions. Most normally constituted women like nice, smart, good-looking young men; he grew to be "*ce cher Johnny*," or "*ce pauvre Johnny*" on madame's lips. She did not wish him success, but she, too, was sorry for him. She permitted his assiduities to her pupil because of their discreetness as much as because of their hopelessness. And so it was that, in spite of this hopelessness, Johnny found himself pleasantly among friends during his French trips.

Yet this evening Sarolta had positively scowled at sight of him. It was disheartening.

"Have a cup of tea," said Sady, comfortingly.

As he sat down he cast anxious eyes at the countenance of his adored one. Those fine black brows of hers were still drawn; those lips he loved were set into a line which only youth and their lovely carmine kept from being stern to hardness.

Sarolta had many times looked angrily at him — indifferently, mockingly. But to-night there was something else in her rare glance: contempt — almost dislike! He wondered what he had done — She had been expecting some one else, and was disappointed to find it was only the stupid Johnny! That was it.

She was expecting some one else! As this conviction grew upon his mind his face flushed darkly. Who could it be? He put down his teacup.

Sady here, unconsciously, enlightened him.

"Sir John, did you not hear me say, you're just in the nick of time?"

"Did I?" said he, confusedly, startled from his jealous trend of thought.

"My, yes! — you needn't be frightened a mite. Sarolta, do for goodness' sake put a pleasant face on! — You've just scared your visitor stiff. She'll smile on you in a minute, Sir John, if you'll only promise her all the books on Iphigenia that have ever been written, the first possible moment to-morrow morning."

"Iphigenia?" echoed the bewildered Johnny.

"Yes, my dear sir, Iphigenia — a Greek lady, who, as well as I recollect, was unkindly treated by her papa. Behold!" said Sady, waving her hand — "the new Iphigenia!"

Sir John was more at sea than ever. "I never knew you had a father about, Miss Sarolta." At which Sady's laughter rang out, while Sarolta only hunched her shoulders like a petulant schoolgirl.

"Sir John," cried the American, "is it possible to be so lost to culture?"

"Perhaps," said Sarolta, suddenly fixing the young man with darkling eyes, "he's never heard of Lothnar either."

"I'll be shot if I have," said Johnny.

But, even as he spoke, memory pricked him. Stay, where had he heard that name? When had he seen it written?

"Lothnar," he repeated; "wait a minute! — I say, isn't he a fellow who writes songs or something? That

day I found you in your old lodgings, with your aunt, you know, you had a song with that name on it, on the piano." He was smiling at his own acumen, when the jealous anxiety returned in full force. "I say, is he the fellow you were expecting to-night?"

Even Sarolta's ill-temper was not proof against such an absurdity; she joined in Sady's mirth with a laugh as uncontrolled as a child's. Then both the girls spoke together:

"Lothnar here!" mocked Sarolta, "we'd be as likely to have Kaiser William!"

"Why, man alive!" cried Sady, "Dr. Lothnar's a tremendous person! The great genius of the century, as madame calls him. But it's quite true," she added, "Sarolta's expectation has to do with him: we are to know to-night whether he's going to have her to sing in his new opera."

"It's almost settled I'm to be his Iphigenia," said Sarolta.

She lifted her head proudly, drawing up her slender throat. The glance she fixed on Johnny was no longer unkind; it was brilliant with a wonderful light.

"By George," thought he, "her very face seems to shine! . . . Oh, how beautiful she is, and how I love her!" thought Johnny, while his honest heart sank low and lower with an indescribable sense of failure.

Vaguely it came upon him that a rival admirer might have divided them less than this. So the moment had come, the thought of which he had abhorred and dreaded from the first. Sarolta, flower of girlhood, was to tread

those desecrating boards; was to offer herself up for the public pleasure, be criticized, stared at, admired, applauded, or hissed.

"Oh, I say!" he murmured feebly.

But Sady caught a glimpse of the misery in the young man's eyes, and was moved to administer consolation.

"It ain't all settled yet, you know!"

"Sady!" . . . reproached her friend fiercely.

And here it was, as if madame's dramatic instinct could never fail her, even at a distance, that the little bell pealed again and all three started to their feet.

"That's it!" said Sady.

"Let me go!" said Sir John.

Sarolta sat down again, seized with trembling.

It was an irony of fate, surely, that it should be from poor Johnny's own hand that his beloved should receive the summons to her new life.

"All is arranged," madame wrote in her wild scrawl. "I expect you to-morrow, at ten o'clock. . . . My dear little Iphigenia!"

The parcel of Greek translations which Sir John had duly brought round in the morning remained unopened where they had been deposited in the antechamber.

Thérèse, the Normande, had put them out of her hand in a dark corner; and Sady herself only found them long after Sarolta's departure.

For the old life in the pleasant rooms of the Rue de Clotilde was destined to go on but for three days more: all Lothnar's decisions were followed by prompt action, and

Sarolta had hardly a moment to breathe — much less to think. She received immediate orders for Frankheim; only sufficient delay being granted to enable Madame Costanza to communicate with the London relatives.

The girl had one or two solemn interviews with her singing-mistress — in which that lady gave her a vast amount of advice, professional as well as motherly, but hardly any enlightenment upon the future.

Dr. Lothnar himself had arranged, she was informed, where she was to live at Frankheim; and had even provided a companion for her journey, from whom she she was to receive all necessary instructions.

“As for you,” said madame, “you have just to be obedient. Regard yourself as one going to a new school — but don’t altogether forget the old teaching.”

She came to the station to see her pupil off — that was a dramatic moment! She folded the girl in a warm embrace; chid Sady gayly for her tears; and finally thrust Sarolta into the compartment designed for her, after a volubly conducted introduction to a sallow, elderly person who already occupied it.

Frau Teresa Hegemann silently extended a knobby hand to Sarolta. It was cold, even through its brown woollen envelope.

“Write to me, honey!” implored Sady. The tears were coursing down the uplifted face, the small pointed chin quivered.

“I will, I will!” cried Sarolta, waking from the sort of trance that held her, to lean out of the open window toward her disconsolate friend.

Madame Costanza's kind, handsome face, though determinedly wreathed in smiles, seemed to her to wear a look of doubt, almost of anxiety. The night was very chill, and the hour uncongenial to high spirits. The prospect of so many dark hours of journey, in a second-class carriage with so grim-looking a companion, was disconcerting. Sarolta felt as if she were being wrenched from all warmth, safety, and affection; and unacknowledged misgiving assailed her.

Madame, meanwhile, was persistently haranguing the taciturn German lady; she expatiated on the convenience of there being no one else in the compartment, on the excellent sleep they both could have, each on her banquette, on the possibility of obtaining coffee at the frontier.

"Please be seated, fräulein," said Frau Hegemann suddenly to Sarolta. "You cannot be aware that you are blocking the window and keeping me from hearing all that Madame Costanza has to say."

It was her sole acknowledgment of the great lady's urbanity.

As Sarolta hastily sat down, madame made a little rueful grimace at her.

"Still a couple of minutes," she said, consulting her watch. "*Voyons*, Sady; do not let yourself go like that, you will do your voice a mischief!"

It was here that Sir John Holdfast made a totally unexpected, but not unwelcome, diversion. He came rushing along the platform, interrupting his progress with little jerks to stare into the high carriages as he passed. The expression of his face was comic in its intensity.

Sady waved her soaked handkerchief with a little giggle; and this brought him with a rush to their compartment. He was encumbered with one or two parcels, besides the inevitable flowers. Even as he came to a standstill, doors were slammed and whistles sounded. He had time but for a few inarticulate words:

"Just found out you were off — thought I'd never catch you! — Few flowers — few *bombons*."

(It is to be admitted he said "*bongbongs*.")

Madame and Sady good-naturedly assisted in the hoisting up of these farewell tokens. In her forlorn frame of mind, Sarolta hardly knew how gentle was the glance she gave him, how pathetic the smile!

The long train groaned and moved away. The girl shut her eyes tight, clenching her teeth: she would not trust herself to give a last look at those kind faces, those waving hands, whose clasp had been so strong and friendly!

"*Dieu vous bénisse, mon enfant . . .*" Madame Costanza's farewell words were lost in the rattling of the window as Frau Hegemann severely closed it.

Sarolta lay back wondering why she should feel so forlorn. How joyfully she had skipped away from London, on the occasion of her first great departure; how little she had minded the tears of the Mosenthal herd; the regrets of her English friends! Nay, to be frank, had she not rather been glad than otherwise, when fat, vulgar, good-tempered Aunt Rebecca had left her to her own devices in Paris?

Madame and Sady — these two were more to her

than those others to whom she owed all. Even the scent of Johnny's flowers was gushing up to her nostrils now with a singular appeal.

The train was moving quite fast through a panorama of half-built, lamp-lit roads. She cast a look upon the unfamiliar outside world, and then, for comfort, parted the tissue-paper to gaze at her bouquet. She started as Frau Hegemann addressed her:

"*Es thut mir Leid*, fräulein, but it will be quite impossible for me to endure those flowers in the compartment. All strong scents are, *überhaupt*, noxious to the voice. So, for your own sake, you will do well to throw them out of the window."

Sarolta's first impulse was to resist so absurd and ill-natured a demand.

"Really! ——" she began.

She broke off, however. Had not madame said, "You must be docile?" Was not this old woman, odious as she might be, chosen to look after her by Dr. Lothnar, by the great Master, himself?

"If I cover them up, very closely, in the paper again . . ." she faltered.

"I cannot have it at all, fräulein," said the other firmly. "And, anyhow, it is perhaps best that we should come to a clear understanding from the first. It is under my roof that you will reside, at Frankheim, *das Hegemannsche Haus* — a boarding establishment for ladies of the highest families, who desire privacy and retreat — and the institution is conducted upon the strictest principles of discipline. No gentlemen are admitted

promiscuously." She paused, and the gaze she now fixed upon the girl was charged with unpleasant significance. "I allow no promiscuous intercourse under my roof," she went on, emphasizing the words with her brown-gloved hand. "Frankheim is not Paris," she asserted, with German hatred and contempt. "My regulations, with regard to the young ladies entrusted to my care, you will find, no doubt, very different from those of Madame Costanza's. Neither out of doors or within, will young females boarding with me have opportunities for light intercourse. I make no inquiries into your past, *fräulein*," she concluded with increasing venom, "but you must understand that this kind of thing cannot occur at Frankheim!" — the bony finger indicated the flowers.

For all reply Sarolta sprang to her feet, let down the window, and flung the lovely bunch of fragrance and colour into the night. She had never wanted Johnny, nor his love-tokens; yet, as she cast this last one from her, it seemed as if she had been made to sacrifice something that was both good and strengthening to possess.

She sat down again, panting a little, feeling the cold of the air rush across her burning cheeks with a sense of relief.

"May I beg that you will shut the window again," said her companion, sarcastically polite.

CHAPTER VII

“HEGEMANNSCHE HAUS, FRANKHEIM:

NOVEMBER 3.

DARLING:

I hope you had the post-card announcing my safe arrival. I have your two dear letters. Forgive me, Sady. I know I ought to have written, but I could not. A week here to-day, and oh, my dear, you can't think how horrid it is. I don't know how I shall stand it.

Madame said I must regard myself as a girl going back to school. I never thought how true that was going to be, or what a disgusting school I was to find myself in, with Frau Hegemann for head-mistress. She's got an old sister, Fräulein Schwank, and she's just as bad.

I've got a pocket of a bare room, looking out on a narrow street, and here I sit with nothing to do — nothing to do, Sady, that is the worst of all. There are three other girls here; I don't care much about them somehow, though they are pretty, I will say that, and quite young. They are too German and I don't think they like me. They are to have some part, they think, in the new opera; they don't know what yet. One of them — she is almost a peasant — sang in “Prometheus.” I believe they hate me because they've heard I am to be put before them.

And there are some old cats that match Frau Hege-
mann and her sister. We are never allowed out by
ourselves; we are hardly allowed to talk to each other,
undragoned by Frau H., or one of the old cats in
question. I could scream. Sometimes I think I'll
run away. It's positively maddening. I keep asking
Frau H., "What am I to do?"—"You must wait,
fräulein. You will be told in due time what you are
to do." "But my work?"—"You can practise your
singing in the *salon*."

"*Ach, was!*" I cry. "How can I practise when I haven't
even got the score?" "That you'll have to wait for,
fräulein." "And besides," working myself up into a
fine fury, I assure you, "if I am to be expected to get
up my part in your stuffy *salon*, with everybody coming
in and out——!" "You will be told, fräulein, what is
expected of you, when the time comes."

And so it goes on. Would you believe it?—she wouldn't
even let me buy the book about Iphigenia! One thing
I have secured, though, and that is the words of "Prome-
theus," as Lothnar produced it — it's stuck up in every
book and music shop with picture-postcards, and photo-
graphs, and portraits of Lothnar himself, and Friedhelm
Reinhardt, the tenor, as Prometheus. You remember,
don't you, Sady, how madame raved about him? I'm
going to send you a couple of them — I mean the post-
cards — and one of the new theatre, which is in the mid-
dle of the Park. Of course I haven't been allowed to
see that yet: it is the resort of the Frankheim fashion
and the military, you know! We trudge up and down

the wet streets — it's fiendish weather — with some old gorgon at our heels. The only thing that consoles me is that it is Lothnar, Lothnar, Lothnar, on every side. I went into a shop to buy some shoelaces, and there was a dreadful coloured picture of him over the counter, with a laurel-leaf hanging crooked on the corner of it; and the shopman was talking to a fat customer about him. "Ja, he has arrived, *unser Doktor*," he was saying. "He is at the Altschloss. Na — na, *bewahre!* Now nobody may approach him. *Er componirt ja.*" "One says the new piece is to be *grossartig*," said the other. "*Grossartig?*" echoed the shoemaker, wagging his head. "My son, he is third flute, as perhaps the Gna Herr has heard." . . .

And then, my dear, Frau Hegemann plucked me by the elbow, and told me it was unbecoming to try and attract the attention of strange gentlemen! And oh! Sady, I should like to have bitten her, only that I hate her so that her very touch makes me shudder. Schoolgirl! My dear, I am kept like an infant, a prisoner, a Carmelite. Oh, our dear free Paris days, our dear pretty home together! You and I used to feel like birds, used not we? — able to fly together wherever we liked, and such a dear nest to go back to! Sady, Sady, our teas, our little dinners — the *petit pains* — quite hot, and the smell of the wood fire! Even if the rain pattered on our roof, it was so gay — and when the sun shone, it was just a white and gold town, with the blue of the sky above!

Why am I kept like this? I don't understand. I am miserable. If something doesn't happen soon, if Dr.

Lothnar does not send for me soon, I shan't be able to bear it.

I saw to-day on a placard that they are going to give a performance of "Prometheus." I don't suppose there's the least use in my asking to go to it. But they have allowed me to read the book, at least.

NOVEMBER 5.

No, Sady, darling, I'm not dead. You ought not to scold me for not writing. You won't, when you get this, and know how too unhappy I have been. Well, *Schätzchen*, things are a little better. Actually, actually, I've been allowed to speak to a man! Indeed, I have been sent for, to speak to two men — what do you think of that? Of course, the old cats were there, and the other three girls; but — things are better. I'll begin at the beginning. I was sent for to the *salon*, and there was a great, splendid giant of a man, with a flung-back fur-coat, a blonde beard and tossed hair — I wonder if you've guessed? It was the tenor, Friedhelm Reinhardt. He is just like his portrait on the postcard I send you, only not so inspired, of course. But so kind-looking, and so kind too! I've quite lost my heart to him. Now, don't be ridiculous, miss! He's got a wife and I'm to go and have *kaffee* with them next week.

It seems he is Dr. Lothnar's dearest friend; so the least scratchy of the old cats told me. They are like brothers together, and he is the only man who is not afraid of the Master. You've no idea what a strange feel-

ing it is. The power of the man, shut up in his Altschloss; quite away, and yet dominating every mind in this little town. Even I feel it. Frankheim is Lothnar's — the very air of the place is full of him. Lothnar — his Opera House, his great schemes, his next work, the last music festival, his oddity, his genius, his tyranny, his greatness — there is nothing but that. The Grand-Duke himself is not in it. He is only at Lothnar's beck and call like the rest of us.

Well, this is rambling away, isn't it? I must go back to that stuffy *salon*. The other man, my dear, was a stout German with spectacles. Uncommonly stolid I thought him, until I heard he was Herr Webel, Lothnar's great conductor. Except Lothnar himself none but Webel has ever been allowed to have anything to say to the Frankheim orchestra. He has round eyes that stare straight before him. He hardly said anything at all, but just sat with his thumbs pressed together over his waistcoat and nodded, or shook his head, when spoken to.

We had to sing in turn, and Herr Webel accompanied us. It made me feel rather nervous; but, except madame, no one ever accompanied me like that before. That peasant girl has a voice like a bell.

And oh, Sady, I have so much to say I don't know how to get it in! They brought us tickets for the "Prometheus," and we are going to-morrow night. And we are to have a music-room to ourselves — I and the girls; only two of them left, by the way; for the other has been sent packing — I don't know why. She got the

message to-night. I asked for her at supper, and was just told she was gone.

We are to begin work soon; and I think I understand that Herr Reinhardt has had his orders, that he is to put me through my part, to begin with. It seems funny, doesn't it? that the tenor should coach the soprano. But nothing is done here as it would be anywhere else. We don't question — we just obey.

Oh, pray that I may not prove a failure! The way that girl was just bundled off has given me the creeps! What shall I do if I am found wanting in the end!

NOVEMBER 6, MIDNIGHT.

Sady, Sady, I am back from the "Prometheus." It is the most glorious thing! You can have no idea of it. It's — no, I cannot describe it. You must hear it for yourself. I am entranced, in ecstasy, *hors de moi!* And Reinhardt was magnificent. When I saw him I wondered how it would be, for somehow he is such a Teuton, such a Viking — a regular Siegfried, not a Greek. But it was an absolute revelation of power. Prometheus is a Titan — half a god; and Reinhardt, his voice, appearance, the whole impersonation was Titanic. *Colossal!* one could hear people saying to each other all over the theatre.

There was a box with the curtains drawn, and I believe Lothnar was behind them — some say with the Grand-Duke, who likes to come incognito like that. I am sure Lothnar was there, for one could not help feeling his presence. Oh, I must finish this long letter.

CHAPTER VIII

"PERMIT me, dear Bertha, to present to thee Fräulein Vaneck of whom I have told thee so much. Fräulein, this is my *liebes Fräuchen*."

"Ach, Fräulein Vaneck," said Frau Reinhardt. "I am heartily glad to make your acquaintance! It is true, my husband has spoken much of you. He tells me of the wonderful voice — *Ach*, fräulein, what courage you have! How often I say to my man: 'I could find it in me to wish thou hadst been born without a voice.'"

"Do not believe her!" said the good-natured tenor, showing a row of splendid teeth in the wide smile of a child. "She is quite pleased, sometimes, when I have a little success."

"*Na!* — I admit," said Frau Bertha complacently, "I am proud of my man."

Sarolta thought to detect a certain condescension in the proprietary tone of this remark, and hazarded the question:

"Are you, perhaps, also a singer, *gnädige frau?*"

She spoke timidly enough. It was the first time she had been permitted such a dashing act of freedom as this afternoon visit, unattended. The rigid guardianship to which she had been subjected since her arrival in Frankheim had acted depressingly upon her sensitive artist

nature, and seemed to have made of her a different being from the Paris Sarolta—gay, self-reliant, *ne doutant de rien*, sure of her own importance in the scheme of the world. She coloured hotly now at the unexpected effect of her remark.

"I!" cried her hostess, straightening her plump figure with an offended air. "I—fräulein. *Ach*, that is truly a comical idea!"

Friedhelm Reinhardt himself appeared as anxious as his wife to correct the impression.

"*Bewahre!*" he exclaimed—the vernacular equivalent to "Heaven forbid!"—"My wife is the daughter of Mr. Privy Councillor Court-Medicine-Doctor Stieglitz, of Darmstadt."

"You can conceive, fräulein," added the hostess, smoothing down her ruffled feathers with something of the movement of a little fat pigeon, "that when I broke with every tradition of my family, to wed with my Friedhelm, it was not altogether an easy matter. . . . *Ach*, my *Papa*, and *die Tante* and my *seliger Onkel* the *Justizrath*. How were they not angry! But love, fräulein, love conquers all."

Her bright brown eyes swam sentimentally.

"Yes," echoed the Viking. He laughed in his blonde beard, but the laugh was tinged with emotion. "Love, as Bertha truly says—love conquers all!"

"And I would not wish thee other than thou art," admitted the noble Bertha. "Thou knowest that, my Friedhelm!"

"There is no mistaking it," thought the astonished Sarolta. "The creature is patronizing that great artist!"

She sat with parted lips, staring from one to the other, under her straight brows; and blushed again to intercept the amorous glance that passed between the two.

In her mind was a rising scorn. How was it the man did not realize that it was he who condescended! What could he see in her that he could look with such eyes of admiration and affection? — could look at this uninspiring, commonplace court-doctor's daughter from Darmstadt?

The Reinhardts' house was a quaint wooden structure some way beyond the walls of the old town. It reminded one of Switzerland, not only in appearance, but in actual situation; for it was perched on the side of the hill, with a pine-crowned crag at the back. Sarolta had had to climb a precipitous path to reach it from the main road. Had the windows been opened, the roar of a torrent would have filled the room.

But the windows were not open. Frau Bertha was no advocate of such a system. Wasteful in winter to let in cold air when stoves were lit; while in summer, hot air, sunshine, dust, and flies were equally obnoxious to the housekeeper.

Sarolta thought sarcastically that the lady's type of mind was well enough typified by the atmosphere about her. But there was an agreeable fragrance of fresh-ground coffee, which redeemed the situation.

Buxom Frau Bertha bustled to serve her; and, though prejudiced and disdainful, the girl could not but notice the excellence of the beverage, the crispness of the *Waffeln*, and the snowy daintiness of the embroidered

napkins handed with every cup. It was evident that the singer's wife was a *hausfrau* of the first order.

The conversation proceeded briskly, though in a one-sided manner. Friedhelm was for the most part silent; attentive to his guest, and ready to beam an affirmation to the smallest appeal from his wife. Sarolta, too, had little to say; but she was by no means in one of those moods of dreamy absorption, in which the external world was a blank to her. She was, on the contrary, keenly alive to Frau Bertha's chatter. For the name of Lothnar was forever recurring in it, and each artless word cast a fresh light upon that isolated and mysterious figure.

"You like our little house, Fräulein Vaneck? *Ach*, it gives me pleasure to hear you say so. But what a position! What? You like the position? Is it possible! That water yonder, as I said to Dr. Lothnar, I hear it in my sleep. It pursues me! And those gloomy pine-woods! The doctor says they're wholesome. Gott! They make almost as much noise as the water, with the wind in them! And then the inconvenience — as I told Dr. Lothnar with these lips: 'Of course *you* cannot realize the inconvenience — quite twenty minutes' walk to the market! And by-and-by, when our Ulrichchen grows up, what a way it will be for him to get to the school!' So I said to Dr. Lothnar — and he little Ulrich's godfather! He will never be able to come back to his dinner. He will have to take it in a basket! And then, the loneliness! Not a house nearer than the town — except indeed the Schloss — and that is all very well for Friedhelm to be so

near the Schloss, as I tell him; but what diversion is it to me who am not allowed across the threshold. Though indeed, Herr Lothnar can be very agreeable company, fräulein. Affable and entertaining—and sometimes comic! *Ach*, to make one laugh to death!”

Sarolta frowned involuntarily; it displeased her to hear that the Master could be affable and entertaining to this second-rate little woman. She did not for a moment believe that he could be comic!

But she was thrilled to know that the Schloss was near; and the end of her hostess's next speech made her rise and eagerly go to the window.

“*Na*, what can one do? When the doctor orders, we submit. We all submit. Is it not so, Friedhelm? Bah, even Frau Hegemann, rigid as she is, has to duck the head when he so much as lifts a finger. He said to me: ‘I must have Friedhelm within reach;’ and, true enough, he will summon him at any time. We hear the great horn blown from the balcony of the music-room yonder; and even if my poor man has but just sat down to a *Kalbscotelette*, he must drop his knife and fork and hurry away! Is it not so, my Friedhelm? *Na*, fräulein, you can see a bit of the roof and the gilded vanes over the trees.”

She followed the girl to the window as she spoke, and the flow of her talk uninterruptedly babbled on:

“Figure to yourself, dear fräulein, that we were settled in the most delightful apartment imaginable. Conceive! A second-floor, looking on the Markt Platz! What had we not there? Electric light, telephone, central heat, and

society. But Herr Lothnar — Herr Lothnar would have none of it! *Ach*, might he not have run a telephone wire to the Schloss? But the look he gave me when I suggested it. . . . I'm not often frightened, but I did not dare say another word, I assure you. Ah, these artists! And then he had some droll idea — that is his way, Fräulein Vaneck: Prometheus can only evolve himself among pines and crags, he said. He would not listen to me when I told him that Friedhelm was scarcely ever disturbed in the dining-room. Rocks and pine-trees! Did he not tell thee so, Friedhelm? And so it was. Pack, pack! *Ach*, what a career! You have courage, fräulein. Another cup of coffee, Friedhelm? Thou hast had but three!"

Sarolta still stood, gazing out. There ran the red road looping round the precipitous hill upon which stood the wooden house. Yonder it lost itself behind a cluster of trees, and there it ran again in view. Where spread that mass of black trees was the park, and the curvetty weathercock rising from among them marked the Schloss. The Schloss! The enchanted dwelling where brooded the magician whose wand ruled them all.

Then she glanced up at the lowering pines that seemed to hang over the house and longed to fling open the casement that she might catch the full voice of the torrent.

A Prometheus can only evolve himself among pines and crags, he had said. There, in words, was the Lothnar as she conceived him — far away indeed from the affable comic man of Frau Reinhardt's description!

The mighty drama of Æschylus had laid hold of her

imagination. Yes, the singer who would be inspired to interpret the Prometheus of Æschylus and of Lothnar should steep himself in such wild and solemn scenes!

How superb Friedhelm had been in the part was the talk of the year. The girl now heard him gulp down his fourth cup with disdainful amazement. Suddenly she turned excitedly back into the room.

"Frau Reinhardt! Here is a man coming down the path through the pines toward the house. . . I think, I think, it is Dr. Lothnar!"

Her eyes were filled with the vision of the striding figure, bareheaded and bent against the wind, with wide gray cloak flapping behind. It could, she was sure, only be Lothnar; and there seemed fitness that he should come down like this from the ruggedness of the mountain and the sombre shade of the pines, marching against the wind.

"'Tis he, indeed, *guter Kerl!*" said Friedhelm jovially.

"*Ach, was!*" exclaimed his little wife. "That means fresh *Waffeln*. I will tell Rosa to beat the paste, ready for me to turn. *Ach!* and little Ulrich; shall he not have his plaid frock to greet the godpapa?"

"Wait a minute, Bertchen," advised the tenor. "The Master may not be in the mood for our *wormlet!* Na, I must open the door to him."

Sarolta remained standing, amazed that the knowledge of an advent, which was plunging her in such agitation, should be received in this manner. Hot *Waffeln!* — the plaid frock for the *würmchen!* Frau Bertha certainly had the talent to bring everything down to her house-baking level! Then she began to wonder: ought

she not to go? Her hostess had vanished to the kitchen. She could hear Friedhelm's lusty shout in the garden, answered by another as lusty. Ought she to try and slip by the two as they met; or would not that seem a discourtesy?

Frau Bertha reappeared, scarlet-cheeked and bright-eyed. She screamed at the mere suggestion.

"*Ach, was!* But it is quite likely he is come here to look at you! Besides, I promised Frau Hegemann to conduct you back."

Lothnar seemed to carry the breath of the pine-woods in with him. He entered at his hurling gait, brought himself up short, undid his great cloak at the throat, and flung it at Friedhelm.

"How, how! — what is this?" he shouted. "It is suffocating here. Do you never open a window, frau?"

"*Aber*, yes, every morning, *Herr Doktor*, to shake the rugs," cried the lady, scandalized.

"Well, since they can open, open all, for God's sake," ordered the newcomer. "How can my tenor keep his lungs in play if you give them no air? Answer me that!"

"*Na*; when a man perspires so freely as my Friedel it is very dangerous to let the open air in upon him."

"He would not perspire so much," pronounced the Master, "if you did not keep him in a furnace. Ah, you women, are you not the devil? Is it not true, Prometheus?"

Prometheus turned a heated countenance from the task of unbolting the casements. He mopped his forehead; a gust rushing by the window set his blonde beard waving.

"It is true I perspire freely" he said in a non-committal tone, while Frau Bertha plucked Sarolta by the sleeve and whispered:

"That is what the doctor always says: Women are the devil! Is he not comic!"

Dr. Lothnar drew in the air with a sharp sound, and then for the first time seemed to become aware of Sarolta's presence. He hailed her:

"*Ach* — are you there!"

At that she advanced to him. His hands behind his back, he surveyed her.

"So! There you are."

Frau Bertha pattered out of the room, coffee can in hand; and Lothnar turned his head quickly at the sound of the closing door.

"Fresh coffee, ha?" he queried of Reinhardt, who stood impassive, genial, beside him. "Thy *fräuchen's* coffee is worth drinking."

"And to-day we have *Waffeln*," added the giant, simply.

"*Waffeln?* — *Prachtvoll!* Only have a care, *mein bester*; not enough air and too much clover, and you'll get too fat for me — and then what shall I do?"

"Oh, I shall grow thin. You'll see to that!" said Reinhardt, with his flashing smile, as he wheeled the best armchair forward. "You'll take it out of me in good time, when we begin the repetitions, never fear!"

Lothnar let him self drop into the seat, with a groan of content.

"Fräulein, if you will place that little table at the

Master's elbow," whispered the tenor, "I will help the wife to carry in the coffee."

"*Mein* Friedhelm," said Lothnar suddenly, "when didst thou fail to please me?" He spoke with a softening of his whole countenance, smiling with lips and eyes, in a way that was a positive revelation to Sarolta. His harsh voice had a husky tenderness. She had been brewing indignation at the manner in which she was treated. She was not a little girl — nor an inferior — to be kept standing and ordered about. Yet, as Lothnar spoke these last words, like a flash her puerile irritation went from her. She told herself, passionately, that for such a look, for such a tone from him, she could gladly die.

Then she was alone with him, and the blue eyes were upon her.

"*Na*, and that table?" he was saying, with a quizzical smile.

Flushing, she brought it. With the well-remembered jerk of his eyebrows, he kept her standing.

"Well, and how do you like Frankheim? And how does Frau Hegemann look after you?"

His glance was once more plunging and searching. Sarolta's spirit began to rise to the challenge.

"I shall like Frankheim well enough, especially when the work begins," she blurted out, "but I hate Frau Hegemann. Look after me? She looks after me as if I were her prisoner."

Lothnar drew his brows; his rugged face took an air almost of ferocity.

"Quite right," he growled, twisting his fingers in his beard. "That is my will; I keep my vestals close."

He disengaged his hand; lifted his forefinger, threatening. There came a thunder into his voice:

"Aha, what is that I hear of you? What of young men with bouquets and presents at the station? Iphigenia with sweethearts! *Pfui!* What have you to do with a sweetheart? Answer me that."

The girl blushed to agony, as she cried indignantly:

"I have nothing to do with any sweetheart."

"So. What business has that young man about you?"

"No business. He wants to marry me. I won't have him. That is all."

"So. Then if you won't have him, why do you let him bring you pretty things? Why do you keep him dangling? Why do you take his flowers? Is that maidenly? Is that becoming? Is that for an Iphigenia? Come here. Come nearer. Let me look into your eyes. Do you not understand what maidenliness means to the maiden? If you lose that, who is to give it back to you?"

It was as if, fascinated by his power, Sarolta could not resist compliance. Yet, even as she drew close and advanced her now whitening face to his gaze, there sprang a fury within her, so overwhelming that if she had had a weapon to her hand she might well have struck with it.

He broke into an unexpected chuckle and motioned her from him.

"*Na*, it goes still, it goes still! A German virgin, with eyes cast down, tears and blushes ready at a look, such a one you are not. But fire you have; and it is

still white flame. That is well. White let it burn!" Then, with a whimsical change, he said curiously: "And why will you not marry him — the rich Englishman?"

"I don't know." Sarolta bit her trembling lip; she might have shed tears with comfort, after that fierceness of anger. But she would not—would have killed herself rather. "I don't want him. I don't want to be married. I ——" she flung him a full, defiant look. "I want to sing Iphigenia."

"So ——" said Lothnar gravely.

CHAPTER IX

A WEEK later, with the abruptness characteristic of him, Lothnar summoned Sarolta, within the hour, to the Schloss. It was Friedhelm Reinhardt who brought the message. He kept the droschke in which he arrived waiting at the door. Frau Hegemann was to accompany them.

Sarolta wondered, as she flung on the fur cap and the warm squirrel coat that had been Sady's farewell gift to her, whether it was in pursuance of his theory of vestals that Lothnar desired this lady's attendance upon her, or whether it was for the purpose of receiving another report. The girl's heart still burned when she recollected that conversation in the wooden house; how she had been spied upon and misrepresented; and the singular things Lothnar had said to her. Yet her wrath was all for the woman, for the servant — not at all for the Master.

She hurried down the stairs and into the droschke, and found that she was expected to take the back seat as a matter of course. Reinhardt, wrapped to the ears in a huge fur coat, had already settled himself beside the multi-angular Hegemann.

The cold was piercing, under a steel-gray sky. The sorry animal that drew the fly slipped and stumbled along over the ice-bound road, to the fierce chucks of his

driver. It was perhaps Frau Hegemann's presence that rendered the tenor so unusually silent. After an encouraging smile to Sarolta, he tucked his beard inside his upstanding fur collar, and became absorbed in thought.

Seated on her narrow perch, Sarolta turned her gaze away from the contemplation of the two visages to that of the shifting scene outside. Up one street they went and down another. The little town grew poor and quaint and ancient; the walls reared themselves; they rattled out under the old Town Gate between barren fields on the one side and the advanced posts of the pine forest on the other. All the mounds and cracks of the red earth were white with frost. Hoar hung from the pine needles; the bramble and ivy strands along the banks were delicately silvered. Friedhelm roused himself as at last his little wooden house came into view, and looked eagerly for some signal from the sealed windows.

"The wife must be in the kitchen," he said, and there was pride mixed with his air of disappointment. It was evident, Sarolta thought, that this perpetual cooking was to him the ideal work of womanhood. She wondered vaguely how he regarded herself — only, of course, as a little girl still, or she would not be sitting back. But when she had blossomed into the great singer she meant to be, surely she would be treated as a being apart. She remembered how operatic stars were regarded in London, the court that was paid to them by the highest in the land. . . . One day people would press forward as she passed, get themselves presented to her as if she were royalty, strew her path with flowers, not from silly

sentimentality like Johnny, but as a testimony to genius. No one would expect her to make coffee or toss wafers, much less to be sitting with her back to the horses as if she were a servant.

The wall of the Schloss park leaped up on one side of them, and in a very few minutes the old horse was drawn up sprawling before the high, closed gates. A surly-looking doorkeeper peered at them through the bars; but at sight of Reinhardt he saluted and unbarred and, groaning on its wheels, the droschke was turned into the avenue.

A slight shiver came over Sarolta, as the dark sombreness of the park closed in about them. Unlike the surrounding country, the trees here were nearly all oak and beech; a rank vegetation had been allowed to riot unchecked. A good deal of brown foliage still clung to the trees, and the untouched leaf-mould of years spread thick underneath.

They emerged, however, presently into a wide space, which must have been devoted to the pleasure-grounds, but which was now a mere stretch of overgrown grass-land, with only here a choked-up fountain and there a lichen-covered balustrade to testify to past splendours.

In the midst of this melancholy decadence rose the Altschloss. Once the most coquettish expression of German baroque taste, and the favourite summer resort of the Electors, it now stood, with its curvetted ironwork rusted, its bulging balconies and its terrace balustrades crumbling, its high, broad-eaved mansard roofs moss-grown, the most forlorn, discarded thing imaginable! *Ludwigsruhe*

had been meant to hold the pleasant pomps, the mimic state, the gallantries, and the intrigues of a little Court, aping, in its puppet way, Versailles's splendours; and its stones, that were carved all for smiles like the lips of a coquette, could have in ruin no dignity.

Any one who found interest in contrasts might have pondered over the grim turn of fate that had made the Sommer Schloss of the princely rulers of yore a refuge for a Lothnar. The man who had chosen this dwelling-place because of its possibilities for a fiercely imposed seclusion, cared as little for the degeneracy of his surroundings as he would have cared for its gilded and tasselled luxury. In the old days his existence would hardly have been acknowledged within those walls, except as an apology for an evening's amusement. Now the stern son of the people ruled as no twenty-seventh Ludwig or Friederich-Karl had ever ruled over the whole province. Frankheim had never known such an autocrat — nay, Frankheim's own legitimate sovereign thought himself honoured by the musician's condescension and would gladly have placed a less neglected residence at his disposal, that he might reign in fitting state.

No such thoughts, apparently, struck Friedhelm Reinhardt, as they drove up. Outside the well-defined circle of their inspiration, great artists are apt to take life as it comes, much as children take it. Frau Hegemann, on her side, was certainly not given to philosophic musings, still less to romantic. As for Sarolta — confused impressions struggled in her brain; and thought jostled thought to a point that sometimes dazed her.

Not yet twenty, she was still just a creature all of impulse, of desire, not of reason or judgment. She felt the romance of Lothnar's surroundings but without defining the sensation.

As she slipped into the empty chill spaces of the hall after her companions, the pitifulness of this faded finery struck her more, indeed, than could any splendour of Gothic decay, open to sky and wind; but the sense of proximity to the immense personality she was about to meet swallowed up all power of consecutive reflection. It was only afterward, in long hours afterward, that she pondered, and knew the poetic singularity of it all.

They were introduced by a good-natured-looking, flat-visaged, square-shouldered servant, who grinned jovially at Reinhardt; and, pointing over his shoulder toward a door on the right, thus addressed him:

"The Master is above, Herr Friedhelm. He would speak to the Frau Tante first. But it is heated in there." He again jerked his thumb, and then beckoned the angular lady stairward.

"Will you come in, fräulein?" said Reinhardt, and opened the door indicated. His own countenance expanded at the gush of warm air that rushed out upon them.

Sarolta came in slowly.

"Na — this is something!" said the tenor, divesting himself of his fur coat and approaching the rose-china stove.

The small, round room was furnished in velvet that had once been crimson, but was now faded to a colour

resembling the lees of red wine. There were hangings of the same round the walls, festooned with gold braid and trimmings so tarnished as to be almost black. Through the grimy, high, square windows, only a dim green light filtered in through the overgrowing shrubbery outside.

"Will you not sit, Fräulein Sarolta?"

The girl stood, frowning.

"What did the man mean," she asked abruptly, "by his Frau Tante?"

A moment the tenor was puzzled.

"Frau Tante? How?"

"Frau Hegemann!" she exclaimed, impatiently.

"So. Aha! Mark is a wag. The good lady is no real aunt to the doctor. Only —" he dropped his voice, "only the aunt of his poor wife, you know."

"How!" cried Sarolta in her turn. She could not explain it to herself, but the word was like a blow. "His wife? Whose wife?"

"Did you not know? Is it possible, fräulein, to be here so long, and not know?"

"No one tells me anything."

"After all, there is little to tell. Lothnar's wife is ill. It is no good making a secret of it — she is mad. Mad — shut up! She is Frau Hegemann's niece. He went to see her yesterday; that is why, no doubt, he sent for Frau Hegemann to-day."

Sarolta sat down; a weakness had taken her in the knees. She had crimsoned and grown very hot, first; now she felt cold even in the close room. She was glad it was so dark. . . . She had not known, she had never

guessed, that Lothnar was married. Married — and his wife mad; how terrible! Was that why his face was so lined, his manner so harsh, his air sometimes so wild and stern? — “How could he have married a niece of that horrid Frau Hegemann?” Almost unconsciously she had formed the words aloud. Reinhardt, standing with his back to the stove, a towering figure in the odd little room, stroked his beard musingly.

“*Ach, Gott*, who can tell? He was very young! *Na* — not twenty. And they say she was beautiful. They had great poverty together. And Frau Hegemann helped them — I believe she took them in when they were starving. She had a *pension* then in Heidelberg. *Ach*, those were days! He has told me a little of them — *Fräulein*, they wanted him to be a teacher in a school! Him! Lothnar! But he knew himself, knew his genius. There was struggle, there was despair. He had to eat a bitter bread, the great one. *Na*, he broke loose in the end; and when the turn of the wheel came, then she had gone mad. . . . Well, he ate the Hegemann’s bread once and was under her roof. That he cannot forget; and now he protects her. You understand?”

“Will his wife ever get better?” she breathed at last. Sarolta had listened with parted lips, her hands in their shabby gloves clutching each other as she sat.

Reinhardt shook his head.

“I fear not — I fear not. They even say she is worse. Last time he told me she is grown like an old woman, and her hair that was golden is quite white.”

Sarolta had a sudden sigh; something secret and evil

whispered within her that she was glad that Lothnar's wife should look like an old woman—that her hair, once golden, should be white; glad, too, that she would never be better.

"You are to come up," said Mark, the servant, appearing with his grin.

As they followed him Frau Hegemann crossed them in the hall. Sarolta fancied that the woman looked at her more sourly than ever—malevolently almost. She noticed that one knobby hand, in its black-knitted glove, was clasped round a folded envelope.

"She has been making her report," thought the girl. "He has given her money."

Her heart swelled with a sense of disdain, mixed with fear. "Yet perhaps," she reflected, "it is her pleasure to spy and repeat; and because she once helped and fed him he is patient and has to listen."

"Go right up, please, Herr Reinhardt, while I put the Gnä Frau in the droschke," called the man in his uncere-
monious, yet not disrespectful manner. "The Herr Doctor will send you home," he added.

As Sarolta went meekly up the stairs behind Reinhardt, she was conscious in some subtle manner that Frau Hegemann was angry at having to leave her behind, and in the satisfaction of this thought her momentary misgiving passed.

"*Ach, thou?*" cried Lothnar in a glad voice.

He did not get up as they entered; he was sitting in an enormous, shabby, leather armchair, that contrasted singularly with the delicate Empire furniture sparsely scattered throughout the very large room.

This had evidently been one of the chief *salons* of the Schloss. A couple of worn Aubusson carpets seemed lost upon the sea of a once polished floor. Even the two grand pianos made small impression of bulk. Some of the windows had no curtains; and in spite of black iron stoves, the pipes of which ruthlessly perforated the once white and gold panelled walls, the air of the place was chilly.

Lothnar sat, his hands hanging limply over the arms of his chair. He smiled; but the girl thought his face was tired and sad. She wondered how much yesterday's visit to his mad wife had to do with those lines of painful thought which furrowed his forehead. Did he love her still? . . . or was it only the horror of it? . . .

"So thou art there, thou true one," the Master went on. "Embrace me then!"

And Sarolta, lingering on the threshold, saw the fair giant bend his head and kiss the rugged face. She had lived among artists and foreigners all her life, and the sight did not startle her. On the contrary, there was something about the bond of affection that so obviously united these two that seemed to her touching. A realization of Lothnar's immense loneliness, but for this, came to her; and with it an odd stirring of jealousy.

"I have brought *das fräulein*," said Reinhardt.

Lothnar turned in his chair to look at her; then he beckoned. "Come here, *du kleine*." His tone was different from any she had yet heard from him in their brief acquaintance. She had still to learn that, compared to the moods of genius, those of a spoilt beauty are monotonous. To-day, if Lothnar was tired and sad,

he was unwontedly gentle. His eyes were kind; veiled was that glance of flame; his air was paternal.

He put out his hand; and for the first time she felt those long fingers close round hers.

"*Na* — what do you think, Friedel?" Retaining her hand as if it were that of a child, the composer looked up at his tenor. "Shall we make an *Iphigenia* of that, dost think? Speak, Achilles! Will she be worth fighting for?" Reinhardt's clear, full gaze rested thoughtfully upon her.

"We have not sung together yet, since you did not wish it; but I have heard her once. The voice — "

He broke off and smiled so warmly, so encouragingly, at the girl, that she flashed back a grateful smile. A moment, like the gleam of steel out of the scabbard, Lothnar's piercing gaze went from one to the other; then the veil dropped over them again.

"She can attack the note, anyhow," he said, "for that, Costanza never fails me. But for the rest — well, we must see, we must see. *Fräulein*," he released her hand, "take a chair, please. A little more to the right — so — that I may see you. And thou, Friedel, hast brought the song I sent thee?"

Reinhardt opened his tightly buttoned frock-coat, and produced a roll of manuscript music.

"Ah, Master," he said impulsively, "it is colossal, it is unspeakable, it is worthy of you! . . . What can I say?"

"Say no more, but see that you are worthy of it, dear one. *Na* — sing it. Sing it to me now!"

He leaned over and reached for the bell with the impatient hand of one who resents the slightest delay. There were slow, firm steps upon the stairs, and an elderly man with a fan-like brown beard sprinkled with gray entered gravely into the room. Sarolta recognized Herr Webel, the conductor.

She was struck once more, with his bourgeois stolid appearance. Here was none of Lothnar's rugged majesty of aspect; none of the Viking beauty of Reinhardt. Where Webel's head was not bald it was close-cropped. His figure was tuberous, his manner heavy and business-like, he wore spectacles. She was no physiognomist to read the serene power in the dome-like forehead, the acute and self-confident intelligence of the glance behind the spectacles, the artistic development of the brow over the eyes.

"*Mein Bester*," said Lothnar, before the newcomer could pronounce a word. "Time for greetings presently! Just now I am in a hurry. *Der Achilles da* — my Achilles must sing! Now, Friedel!"

In silence Webel took a seat at the nearer piano. There was a deliberation about the man that disclaimed the least approach to flurry.

Reinhardt spread out the score; but Webel struck without even glancing at it.

From the first chords a singular emotion took possession of Sarolta. Was it thus with all Lothnar's music, she wondered; and recalled the unforgettable impression of the "Prometheus" evening.

"Stop!" cried Lothnar, abruptly.

The conductor's hands fell from the piano, and Reinhardt, filling his mighty chest for the first note, arrested himself open-mouthed.

"*In Gottes namen!*" said Lothnar irritably, "take off your hat, fräulein. How can one think of Iphigenia in a hat? A hat like that! Ah, that is better; and if one would loosen one's hair a little. *Ach, brava!* . . . Look at her, Friedhelm; now so can it begin!"

CHAPTER X

SAROLTA had heard music almost since her birth. In the happy-go-lucky, scrimmagy, out-at-elbow establishment in Maida Vale one standard at least had been held high — that of pure art. The ethics of the company the Mosenthals frequented may have been misty, their own religious tenets of the most elementary description, but the smallest Mosenthal child would have considered himself disgraced if he had failed to detect a false harmony anywhere, or the first shade of flatness in a violin string. With their bread and milk, they had, so to speak, absorbed great ideals, and had chattered of Gluck and Beethoven, of Wagner and Strauss, in as many tongues as there were nationalities in their blood.

The trivial lilt, the obvious, commonplace musical phrase, were things of scorn to them; and constant, bitter had been their gibes on Pringle teaching and Pringle songs.

Though Sarolta had chosen to blind herself to the truth of this drastic home criticism, excited by Lady Warborough's enthusiasm and that of her friends, and backed by Mrs. Mosenthal (for obvious reasons), in her heart she had always known the true metal from the pinchbeck.

Her year's training with Madame Costanza's, during which she had had further opportunities of hearing the

best music — classical or new epoch-making — through the best interpreters, had further prepared her to appreciate Lothnar.

The huge rising genius of the man had flung its ray into the professor's domestic circle, long before his name had become accepted by the "critics"; and the evening of "Prometheus" had been an unforgettable revelation. Yet it seemed to her, as she sat in the dilapidated music-room of the Altschloss this day, that she realized, for the first time, the full glory of the human voice; that never had her soul been so filled with agony and bliss as by these trial strains of "Iphigenia."

It was Reinhardt, the blonde giant, who stood there; his absurd frock-coat floating loose, the waistcoat Frau Reinhardt must have embroidered for him heaving with every measured breath; yet to Sarolta at this moment, a divine being!

Afterward when her intelligent mind had grasped as much of the art of Lothnar as it is possible to understand apart from the incomprehensible flame of genius, she grew to appreciate how he had made use of simple, appealing, antique themes, of strange, forgotten rhythms, with all the resources of modern knowledge and craftsmanship. Now she only knew what she felt.

She had yet been denied acquaintance even with the scheme of the opera. Classic knowledge had not been included in the curriculum at Maida Vale. Who Iphigenia was, and what her fate; why Achilles — familiar name of some type of invincible hero — broke his great soul in such wrath and lament about her, she knew not.

But when Reinhardt fell silent at last upon an outburst that only the supremest art and the most perfect purity of tone saved from being a roar — a roar akin to that of a wounded lion — it seemed to her as if her heart stopped beating; as if nothing mortal could hearken to such passion and live.

The shattering vibration beat into silence; then Lothnar rose to his feet and spread out his arms.

"Ach, du!" he said.

It was the same exclamation that had greeted the tenor's entrance but charged now with what a world of meaning! Again the composer clasped his interpreter by the shoulders. "Thou!" he repeated.

It seemed enough. Tears sprang to Reinhardt's eyes and ran quite openly down into his beard.

"That I should have pleased you!" he said huskily. Then he wiped his forehead. "It is heartrending! It is gigantic!"

Herr Webel sat on at his piano, without moving a muscle. His eyes were fixed on the score, now; and presently he began to strum out a passage, two or three times in succession, as if tasting the weird rhythm of it to the utmost.

Lothnar passed with a startling rapidity from this moment of emotion to another mood: "And now, for her!" He shot his finger out toward Sarolta. "Where is the score? Let her sing the answer."

Webel dropped his hands from the keys, in the attitude of one waiting. In contrast to his imperturbability, the agitation of the other two was almost comic.

"But, dear Master!" exclaimed Reinhardt, grabbing his fair curls with a gesture of despair. "Have I misunderstood? Were they not your own orders? Did you not bid me hold back the score? She cannot sing it — the thing is impossible."

And Sarolta had sprung to her feet with a cry:

"Herr Reinhardt, what am I to do?"

"*Ach, was!*" ejaculated Lothnar. His bushy brows were heavily drawn together. "What is this?"

It was to her the fulminating question was hurled.

"I do not even know what it is all about!" blurted out the girl in her extremity. "They would not let me as much as buy the book."

"*Ach, was!*" he said again. His eyebrows worked.

"Have I all misunderstood, then?" said Reinhardt in a higher tone of distress. But already the Master's mind had realized and leaped again.

"Did I say so? True, true! No; it is right. Better so. Better so!" He waved fiercely to check any further discussion on a matter settled; then turned once more to Sarolta:

"So you don't even know the story? Well, that pleases me. I shall tell it you. Then you shall sing. And then we shall see."

He laid his hand upon her shoulder; it took all her strength to remain erect beside him under the touch.

"Look at me," he ordered. "Now try to understand. If you are to be singer of mine, you must put your spirit where I wish; at my bidding. Look at me. I am not Lothnar: I am Agamemnon — Agamemnon, the King."

To her dilated gaze, the man, as he spoke, assumed another aspect. There seemed to flow from him, even from his hair and beard, some atmosphere of royalty beyond the comprehension of modern thought. "He says he's a king," she told herself. "He looks like a kind of god!" She remembered the Wotan of the days of her Wagner worship: some such kind of god as that, angry yet subtle, swift and fierce; aye and wounded in the spirit, even as a man might be and yet remaining a god.

"You are my daughter," went on the solemn, compelling accents. "Understand that — my daughter, Iphigenia, the virgin sprung of my house. My glory — my glory and my joy!"

The harsh voice here took a sudden inflection. Had it been as musical as Reinhardt's most exquisite note, it could not have conveyed so keen a sense of pain. "And I have sent for you to my camp by the Ægean Seas, where I and my legions lie idle because of the wrath of the goddess, while the honour of all Hellas waits upon the avenging of our arms. . . . I have sent for you, Iphigenia, because in you alone there is help."

Sarolta flung back her head in unconscious pride, responsive to the clarion call of those last words. But, as her eyes met those of Lothnar's, they fell before some horror she found in them.

"I have offended the goddess, and she will have sacrifice. Do you understand? You have been told that you are here for your bridal; that Achilles, the hero among heroes, is your chosen spouse. Even now, your mother, who loves you, makes ready for the feast and

prepares your wedding raiment. But it is to no man, thou virgin, that offering of thee is to be made."

He bent his head and drew her closer to him by that paralyzing grasp.

"Thou art my child and my beloved; but what the Dread One asks from thee and me, that we must do."

"What is it?"

She spoke in a whisper, hardly knowing that she did so.

"Death," he said.

If he had told it to her as a gladness, an honoured dignity, that she should be chosen to die for so great an end, the something passionate and high in her soul would have leaped to the pictured sacrifice in delight. But it was the utter fear of the doom, the misery and hideousness of it, that he meant to bring home to her. And he did so with a touch so merciless that she almost felt as if she were indeed the helpless girl flung from her height of innocent joy and loving anticipation into this nightmare depth.

She did not hear Reinhardt's expostulation:

"*Ach*, Master, you are frightening the child. It is only a fable, after all, Fräulein Sarolta!" Hypnotized, she felt herself drawn to the piano; she saw how Lothnar swept the impassive Webel from his seat, and himself took his place; heard that broken, muffled beating accompaniment that had haunted her ever since the afternoon in Paris.

"Sing," he commanded over the tragic sobbing beat. "Plead for youth, and love, unhappy doomed child! Plead against thy father's anguish."

He struck the singing notes of her stammering lament;

and, hardly knowing how she did it, she lifted her young voice, higher and higher, in more bewildered cries of pain and prayer. She knew no words as yet — so it had to be these mere notes, flung loose; as it were, birdlike. She was never to realize herself how sweet and pitiful they fell.

All at once, it seemed to her as if Death were actually upon her, and the terror of it beyond endurance.

"*Ach, nein, nein*, I cannot!" she exclaimed, covering her face with her hands, and broke into tears, sobbing and shuddering. "Have pity on me!"

Was it Iphigenia pleading against the sentence, or merely Sarolta Vaneck, breaking under the ordeal?

Then, at the sound of her own sobs, she awoke to what she had done, with a cold realization. She had proved herself unfit, had flung away her chance: she had failed utterly.

Keeping her face hidden in her hands, she stood waiting.

She caught Reinhardt's gasping ejaculation. Her heart sank still further: he too knew it was finished, then! She heard Lothnar rise from the piano, noisily pushing his chair away. Once more now his touch was on her shoulder.

"*Unsinn!*" he was grumbling in his beard. "*Na — na —* weep now if you must. Afterward thou shalt be glad!" He turned, as he spoke, toward Friedhelm: "It works itself out, does it not? How those Greeks understood! First tears, then courage. So it is with women. We men storm first, and then, perhaps, weep. Glad wilt thou be, that I tell thee. Glad thou wilt die — when the time comes, Iphigenia!"

Once more the mood changed with him.

"And now, children, practise this, pretty, together! Daily. Daily. And thoroughly. Is it understood?"

All the way home, through the bitter white mists that had gathered along the frozen roads to the dull sordidness of her dwelling-place, Sarolta was silent. She felt dreamily tired, as one who has fought and gained a battle. But her heart was jubilating, and like a song of triumph the words ran in rhythmic repetition in her ears:

"Du wirst froh sein. . . froh zu sterben. . . das sag ich dir, Iphigenia."

CHAPTER XI

"JOHNNY, Johnny!" cried Lady Caroline, "what is the matter with you? You don't listen to a word I say. You've grown so dull, Johnny. I can't imagine what's come over you."

Sir John Holdfast looked at his godmother with something of the inarticulate misery of the dog in his honest eyes. He had a way indeed of being dog-like, whether in spirits or out of them.

"I've noticed it," proceeded the lady, "ever since I came back to London. But really now, last night, Johnny, you were beyond everything. It was such a nice little party, too, and I put you beside the prettiest girl in London, and I don't think you so much as opened your lips to her."

"I'm very sorry," said Sir John limply.

"What is the good of my having a house for the season if you're going to behave like this? I thought we'd have all kinds of fun together! . . . And they tell me you've taken to the opera. Wagner, too! Now, Johnny, what is the meaning of this? What reason on earth can make you — you — want to go and sit out all through the 'Ring'?"

"To listen to the music, I suppose. That's what fellows go for, don't they?"

"Pooh — nonsense! You, Johnny? You can't tell 'Pop Goes the King' from 'God Save the Weasel!' Now, the truth. Who do you go with?"

"Nobody."

The accents were too sincere to be doubted.

"Well, then," said Lady Caroline, unctuously, "you're in love. Ah!" as she saw the colour mounting to his sunburnt cheek—"you are in love! That's the mystery. Isn't she kind? Won't she have you?" Incredulity was in those heightened tones.

"I hope it's not a married woman. Oh, Johnny, Johnny! Now, my dear boy, let me tell you that at your age that's the very dickens! Of course I know it simply means that you ought to marry. It's very unselfish of me to say so, because I should lose you, of course, and hate your wife. Oh, yes, I should. But I'll pick you out a nice one all the same. What a pity you wouldn't look at little Lettice Vavasour last night! She's young, she's clever, she's pretty. And she's got money, Johnny."

"I don't want money."

"Nonsense — everybody wants money! What with the Budget and that dreadful Lloyd-George, how do you know that he won't walk off with your mines next year — and then where will you be?"

The young man seemed unstirred by the awful prospect. He bent his head dejectedly and contemplated the carpet.

Both his nice sunburnt hands were resting on the top of his cane.

His godmother surveyed him with a kindly, troubled

glance, noting the while approvingly how the crisp brown hair rose from the narrow parting. Could any girl be such a fool as to refuse John Holdfast? Could any woman be hard-hearted enough to flout him?

All at once he looked up. For a whole year he had carried his burden in silence. But there comes a moment when even the most reserved feel impelled to confidence; and Johnny was too simple to be consciously reserved.

"You remember that day when I took you down to Warborough House two years ago?" he asked.

"Dear me — yes; you don't so often take me to parties, Johnny, that I am likely to forget it. And I can't say you shone in your attentiveness that day. Dumped me, with my sprained knee, with that stupid Mary Mauprat and her ugly daughter. What about Warborough House?"

"Oh, nothing, only it began there."

"Did it?" cried his godmother excitedly. Alertly she began to pass in mental review the likely charmers, married or unmarried, seen by her that afternoon, to whom he might have lost his heart.

"Certainly you were odd," she pondered candidly.

"Well, you may as well tell me who it is."

"You don't know her — at least, I don't think you do. She — she — it's a Miss Vaneck, and she sings."

"Sings," repeated Lady Caroline with a piercing scream. "John Holdfast, if you, too, have gone and made a fool of yourself with one of those Aldwych creatures, I'll ——" she broke off, choking. And, as he did not immediately answer her, she took a fresh breath and proceeded in wrathful anxiety:

"Now, Johnny, for heaven's sake listen to me. I know it's the fashion, and all that. And you silly boys think you've done rather a fine thing, when you've handed over your name, your fortune, your honour to one of these . . . these terrible little wretches. . . . In my day it was bad enough, heaven knows, but at least it was not the smart thing to marry them. Of course, I know she's only just eighteen. They all are. They're all alike as two peas, paint and hair and teeth. Listen, Johnny! poor Cassandra Merehaven asked me to meet her daughter-in-law, the other night. She's trying to make the best of her, poor thing; and, oh, my dear boy! there she was — she was Zarah Flower, you know — and there she sat with the Merehaven diamonds on her tousled, dyed head, and a lovely French dress on. Oh, yes, pretty enough in her painted way; but it wasn't that. Lots of people paint and dye! Johnny," she leaned forward and touched him impressively on the arm — "her hands, Johnny!"

"Oh, I say," said Johnny, goaded. "It isn't anything of that sort. It's — Lady Warborough started her; had her taught, you know. She's not got any dye in her hair, nor paint on her cheeks; she's quite young, and her hands —" he paused: how many a time he had stared longingly at those slender, pale hands of Sarolta's, with their vivid trick of gesture, and that way they had of folding themselves fiercely one across the other as if she were clasping destiny! How often he had wanted to take them into his — those disdainful delicate hands.

"Her hands are all right," he went on lamely. "And

she's not been on any stage yet." He winced as he spoke, as if the word hurt him. "She's going to be an opera singer."

Lady Caroline sat bewildered, nonplussed. John Holdfast in love with an opera singer! That seemed about as incongruous a situation as could be devised. But then, by his own showing, it was only an opera singer in the making, some slip of a girl. Lady Warborough's protégée. . . , She knew Vera Warborough's swans!

"Dear me!" she said at last, "it sounds dreadfully silly. She wants to be an opera singer, does she? It does not always come off, Johnny, you know. And ——"

"She's going to appear next month," said John. He drew a printed announcement from his breast pocket and laid it on Lady Caroline's lap. "Her name is there — Sarolta Vaneck. I haven't seen her since she went to that place. She won't let me come to her — and I wish I was dead."

But Lady Caroline caught up the announcement with a staccato cry, as certain words in large print caught her eye. "Lothnar!" "Iphigenia!" "Frankheim!" "But, heavens, Johnny, you don't mean to say . . . ?" she fumbled among her laces for her eye-glass, and, after a closer inspection, proceeded: "My dear boy, this is positively thrilling. Everybody's talking about it! Every one wants to go. They say it's almost impossible to get seats now for months! Lothnar! Count Wenndorf was talking about him last night. I'd give my eyes to go."

Sir John Holdfast dropped back into his moody attitude. "I'd give something to go too. But — she wrote and told me not to. And now she won't answer my letters at all. Hang it all, sometimes I wish I was not a gentleman."

"Perhaps it's just as well," said his godmother consolingly. "After all, Johnny, you'd only make a fool of yourself! You can't marry an opera singer."

"Can't I? I jolly well would — if she'd have me. I'll never have any one else."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"It could not be worse," said John Holdfast solemnly. "Look here, godmother; the first instant I saw her, I knew it was all up with me. And for two years there has not been an hour — upon my soul, I know what I'm saying; if I do sleep, I dream of her — there has not been an hour that I don't think of her. I'd have cut my right hand off to keep her from the stage. But she — have you ever been to that 'Ring' thing? I suppose you have. Well, there's a woman singing in it now. She's doing Brünnhilde, a kind of goddess, you know, with her helmet and her breastplate, who comes flying down the rocks. Well, she reminds me of Sarolta — not in face, because she's red hair and all that, and Sarolta's dark — but there's a kind of fire about her. . . . Oh, I can't explain! And, you know, she hates the thought of love, at first ——"

He broke off. Lady Caroline was listening in amazement open-mouthed. She had thought pleasant, empty-headed Johnny incapable of making so long a speech,

much less of anything approaching the sentimentality it indicated.

"But Brünnhilde was made to love in the end," she remarked at length.

The young man lifted his eyes and looked at her. "Yes," he said heavily. Then he blurted out: "That's just it. She's that kind. When she does love, it will be that way. No one else will have a chance. She'll just leap into the fire."

At another moment Lady Caroline would have been amused at the quaint manner Johnny had jumbled his own story, and that of the opera, the singer, and the character she acted, into one dismal parable! But the young man's unhappiness was too deep not to command respect.

"Why won't she have you?" asked the old lady, not without indignation.

"Just because — oh, she says, because of the career and all that. But it isn't that. It's just — well, I might try forever." He gave a rueful smile. "I can't get through to her, you see; she's on a rock like Brünnhilde. — But I'll never give her up." It was through his clenched teeth that the last words came, scarcely audible.

Lady Caroline sat, absorbed in reflection, one plump, jewelled hand softly beating her knee. Her kind heart was stirred. She could not bear to see her Johnny with that look in his eyes. She sighed; it did not seem so very long ago since she had herself thought that life could not be carried on without the one particular beloved. She had been married very comfortably to another; and

so had he. And yet — had there not always been something lame, something incomplete?

She could not, of course, approve of Johnny wanting to marry out of his class. But, nowadays — and it wasn't as if the girl wanted him either. And, after all, if it made the poor boy any happier to go to Frankheim, why should not she hold out a helping hand? She could not afford the tickets herself, nor the journey on the top of them; but it would mean nothing to Johnny to take her, and it would be a delightful and amusing experience. And every one was going. Lady Caroline was of those who thought much of what every one did.

"Well," she said at last, with the air of one sacrificing comfort, and even principle, for friendship's sake, "I can't bear to see you like this. I am an old fool, I know. But there, you shall take me to Frankheim, if you like. And you shall see your singer — at least from the stalls."

John Holdfast's face did not light up in the manner she expected.

"Since she won't have me there," he said obstinately.

"She can't prevent you from going to see what all the world's going to see," his godmother tartly cried. "You needn't force yourself upon her, because you've got a seat at the Frankheim Opera House. But once there, Johnny, who knows if I mightn't be of use to you? I'm not forbidden to go and see her! Besides," she added, sapiently, "I wouldn't give that for your chances, Master Johnny, if you were to keep sulking in England at the most important moment of your young lady's life. Good heavens, I know what I should think of an admirer who wasn't

ready to lead the house or fling garlands of flowers at my feet on such an occasion. Pooh, don't talk to me about her forbidding you to come! That's a pretty old game! Didn't Brünnhilde have herself surrounded by fire?"

But Johnny was hardly listening any more. The vision of Sarolta's first appearance had risen vividly before his mind's eye. All the world was going; any one who cared and who had the money for a ticket would be there to applaud or condemn. He remembered how nervous she had seemed on the night of the Mortons' concert. . . . What, indeed, would she think of love that left her unencouraged, unsustained at such a moment?

And if she were to prove a failure . . . ?

He had been learning all he could about singers, their duties, their trials, lately; and he knew that no one could quite tell, before the test, whether a new star was destined to shine or fall. If Sarolta fell from her dangerous chosen height, might it not be upon his breast?

"I say, godmother," he cried suddenly, "I'll keep you to that."

CHAPTER XII

THE Frankheim Opera House was packed to overflowing. Besides the subscribers from the town — not at all inclined to cede their privileges even to the wealthiest and most distinguished guests — there was the influx from all parts of the music-loving world. No paper of note but had sent its critic; there were the many amateurs who really cared; the many more who pretended to care; the idle rich and the “up-to-date *à tout prix*.” The Grand-Duke’s party included a young Prince of the Empire. The second Mosenthal boy had travelled from Berlin, and found a seat in the gallery. Madame Costanza, her handsome countenance set into lines of sternness, to conceal the seething excitement within her dramatic soul, sat Sphinx-like in the stage box. Frau Hegemann’s aged visage might be seen on the right of her, and on her left a cocked-nosed, pretty face, quivering and pale: Sady Schreiber had come from Paris with the great teacher — neither of them had been allowed to see Sarolta yet — and Sady wondered whether her friend felt half as nervous as she did.

“I’m just clammy!” she whispered breathlessly into madame’s ear.

But madame’s noble profile moved not by a shade to show that she heard — if indeed she heard.

Johnny Holdfast, piloting Lady Caroline toward the seats he had secured (by a cheque that would have made that lady gasp, had she known), felt, as he told himself, "jolly wretched." Although it was like wine to his starved heart to be once more in the same town with Sarolta, he had something of the sensations of a man about to attend his rival's wedding. His only hope lay in the girl's public failure, and it was not in Johnny to wish for such an advantage as that. Therefore, while his pulses beat heavily in apprehension at the thought of the ordeal before her, he knew that the triumph he could not pray for was his own doom. Had he loved her less or himself more, he would not have been torn between this double anxiety. Strong-willed John Holdfast had a terribly soft heart.

Through this inarticulate pain of his, Lady Caroline, more than usually loquacious, kept up a running commentary which nearly drove him to distraction.

"Johnny, Johnny . . . I declare, there's Lady Warborough! Dear me—and she was so hoity-toity when I spoke to her about your girl, the other day! And isn't that Sir Arnold Pringle beside her? Yes, it is. How charming! I'd rather hear Sir Arnold sing one of his little songs than anything else in this world. No voice, of course, but oh, Johnny, such art, such phrasing! Isn't that the Mrs. Morton who gives the concerts? You know, Johnny—the Jew woman? Don't you see, over there? Oh, Johnny, Johnny, what are you dreaming about! Not that I can't guess! Well, it won't be long before you see her now. Poor Johnny! I wonder if

she'll succeed. . . . You never told me what kind of a voice she has. Dear me, I remember Mario saying to my mother, '*Quel dommage qu'elle soit fille de comtesse!*' I used to sing, dear, like a linnet — contralto, of course. I never think a dark soprano sounds right. By the way, I hope she's not dark, Johnny? Ah, there's Mr. Christy — "

There was a sudden stir through the chattering audience — a hush, and then the simultaneous lowering of all the lights plunged the building into a darkness full of mystery, tense with expectation. From the invisible orchestra the first notes stole upon the ear. They seemed like a far-off call of triumph. Then the beat of drums, muffled in unbroken rhythm, like the tramp of marching feet. Louder the trumpet's call and nearer, with the added voices of many other instruments: rushing murmurs among the strings, light of piping flutes, clash of cymbals — a sense of hurry and confusion mixing with an ordered, marching lilt.

The overture to Lothnar's "Iphigenia" had begun. A web of sound, subtly barbaric, yet rich with the endless resources of the modern orchestra.

Sir John Holdfast, in spite of his recent assiduous attendance at Covent Garden, had certainly no aptitude for appreciating such music as Lothnar's. Had he attended the first night of "Iphigenia" out of mere curiosity or idleness, his criticism would probably have been, "Rummy kind of stuff"; but as it was, he had no eyes, no ears, no senses for anything that was not Sarolta.

The feelings that gripped his heart when the slight

figure in its white draperies first ran in upon the stage, arms outstretched to greet Agamemnon, were all pain to the honest youth. He felt those hundreds of eyes fixed upon his beloved and resented them as a personal outrage.

There was a rustle of emotion through the house, as the first notes of her voice rang out. Little as he knew about music, Johnny realized that they were extraordinarily pure. He knew no German and had very little notion what the drama was about; but from his Eton days there remained a vague memory of Agamemnon's hideous sacrifice, and he wished uneasily they had not given her such a part. In the first act, however, the music allotted to her was all descriptive of innocent joy, virginal hopes, filial trust. The pathos of this was a little lost on Johnny; nor had he the least realization of the art that could draw so piercing a contrast between the gaiety of the cheated girl and the agony of doubt in Agamemnon's moody soul.

When the first act was over, there was no applause: this was by Lothnar's stringent rule printed in red on the programme. But Johnny remained in ignorance of this, as also Lady Caroline, among whose accomplishments German was not. She concluded that the production was a fiasco. For herself she was not surprised — it was even worse than Wagner; that was all she could say.

"What a frost! Good gracious, not even a clap in the gallery; makes one quite uncomfortable. My dear Johnny, fancy bringing me all the way from England to hear this! Not that I am not glad to help you, you silly

boy." She patted his hand. "She is a pretty little thing, Johnny; and she's got a nice voice. . . . I prefer a contralto myself. I wonder how Volga likes being Clytemnestra. . . . Oh dear, couldn't you get Sir Arnold to come and speak to me? How bored he must be! Johnny, do you hear me?"

"I beg your pardon," said, in good English, the German who was Sir John's neighbour, as the latter made a dazed effort to obey. "It is not allowed: see, it is written on your programme. Kindly be seated again; the pause will be very short."

"Good gracious," said Lady Caroline, petulantly.

The lights were lowered even as the exclamation escaped her, and the hidden orchestra broke into a loud lament.

Johnny sat on resolutely. His first sensation of cold misery was giving way to irrepressible hopes. If the whole business was the "frost" Lady Caroline averred — and indeed it seemed like it — by George, he had never come across such a thing in his life; the silence had been deadly! Might not Sarolta take an immediate disgust to such thankless work? Nay, it seemed to him that, had she been personally a success, they must have applauded her if not the music. . . . There had been a lot of whispering and jabbering when the curtain fell, but no one as much as dropped a single *brava*, and some paralyzing sense kept him equally dumb. He told himself now that it had been lucky: even unanimous silence is better than one unsupported effort.

At the conclusion of the second act, Lady Caroline

declared that she had been asleep, and, in the same breath, that she had too sensitive a nature to be subjected to such torture. She asked Johnny fiercely if there was a single melody in the whole affair, and Johnny was unable to answer. Presently, however, she grew quite cheery again, recalling her favourite airs from "Lucia" and "Rigoletto," and was moved to hum one for his benefit when the lights went down again, and Johnny's neighbour cried "Hush!"

"Thank goodness, this is the last act, anyhow," sighed the lady, resigning herself.

Lothnar's librettist was a scholar and poet of standing and the book had been kept singularly close to the antique original. But Lothnar would have none of the "*Dea ex machina*" solution, which he characterized — with that arrogant frankness of his — as *lättre Dummheit*. His opera ended on that utmost point of tragedy when Iphigenia goes forth, high-hearted, to her doom. It was only the sudden strength of spirit in the frail body that redeemed the utter awfulness and desolation of the story. As it was, many eyes were dim in the great audience; and in the pause that fell for one breathless moment, after the last note had died away, some one sobbed audibly.

Then there rang at last such a simultaneous burst of acclamation from every part of the house, that it broke upon the ear like an explosion. Men and women stood up; some sprang on their seats, calling, clapping, waving handkerchiefs.

Johnny gaped dumfounded; then suddenly the frenzy

seized him too, and he shouted his English "hurray, hurray!" — much as a soldier will cheer in the charge which he knows means death to him.

Suddenly the purple velvet curtains were flung apart. The young man held his breath; but instead of the frail, lovely figure he expected, there rushed to the front a tall, ungainly man, with death-white face, dishevelled hair and beard. While you could count ten, this strange being stood facing the clamour of applause hurled at him with much such a countenance of defiance as a man might have opposed to execration. His hands were clutching the curtains on either side of him; his eyes, looking out across that swaying crowd, flamed and yet seemed to see nothing.

Four or five wreaths came hurtling toward him; the next instant he was gone.

As Lothnar strode back across the stage, Webel and Reinhardt — still in his glittering accoutrements — sprang to meet him. He embraced them both without a word; then Reinhardt cried out—loud enough to overcome the clamour ringing on the other side of the curtain, while the tears that emotion easily wrung from his simple nature ran down his cheeks:

"Master, go back — hear how they call —"

"Go back! to be pelted with green stuff!" cried Lothnar. His face was working as if in a violent rage.

Suddenly he caught the young giant to him again; his ice-cold fingers gripping the naked, braceleted arms.

"*Mein besseres Ich* — my better self!" he muttered

through his teeth. "Thou, too, old machine," he said, turning then on Webel and patting his shoulder as if he were a child. "I am content with thee."

The storm rose and fell behind the curtain more fitfully — there was less clapping but more shouting.

"They call for the artists," said stolid Webel.

"Let them call," retorted Lothnar. "He or she that steps outside that curtain sings no more for me!"

Then he swept the stage with those eyes of pale fire. A hesitating group of men, Agamemnon and others of the cast, stood watching him anxiously, not daring to approach. Lothnar took a step forward and held out his hand; but even as Agamemnon clasped it, the composer's glance wandered:

"Where are the women?"

"Madame Volga has gone to her dressing-room," said Webel. "She is very much annoyed that she may not take her call."

"Pshaw! — Where is the little one? *Na*, I will find her for myself. The noise there gets on my nerves. What do they understand, in the end, of me or of my work? Nothing, nothing. . . . Dogs that bark together."

Reinhardt at his shoulder, he went, grumbling, up the stairs that led to the dressing-rooms. As he knocked at Sarolta's door, the tenor left him and retired to his own cell.

It was the girl herself who opened; she stood on the threshold pale and trembling. Lothnar halted before her, staring at her for an appreciable time in silence; then, without making the slightest movement to touch

her, he said a few words in a low voice, turned on his heel, and strode off.

"You — I kiss you in my soul."

These were the words he had spoken.

When Madame Costanza and Sady rushed in upon Iphigenia, they found her sitting, with her hands clasped, a smile upon her lips. To their embraces and acclamations, their kisses and tears, she had scarcely a word of response.

She went through the rest of the evening as one in a dream. Afterward, looking back upon it, she could remember nothing definite beyond that moment in which Lothnar had looked at her, had pierced her to the soul with those blue flaming eyes, and had spoken that unforgettable thing: "I kiss you in my soul." . . .

"*Non, écoutez,*" said Madame Costanza to the appeals of Sady, backed by those of an effusive young Mosenthal. "Leave her alone, the poor little one, she is not fit for all this noise to-night. *Ah ça*, let her be, I tell you! Leave her in the clouds! Yes, yes, go home, *petite*. Go to your silence and your visions. You'll touch earth soon enough! Supper? It is who will sup. *Ah, oui*, it hollows one, those emotions! Come, my children!"

She caught Sady on one side, and Chopin Mosenthal on the other, with a firm grip.

"But first, where is Lothnar? Where is that demon, that angel? Shall I not embrace him? I tell you I will embrace him. Run, Chopin, my son. Find out for me if there is still a morsel of him left to embrace."

But Chopin Mosenthal, the Grand-Duke's equerries, several excited critics from London, Paris, and New York, not to speak of compatriots, were to hunt in vain that night for the composer of "Iphigenia." Lothnar had passed, meteor-like, and was now, with only Reinhardt beside him, driving away through the dark side *Alleen* of the Park back to the well-defended solitude of his Schloss.

There was silence between the two men. Reinhardt was aware that, in the Master's present state of nerve tension, even a look might be more than he could bear. It was only when the great man was seated in his padded armchair, his long, irritable fingers absently filling the china bowl of a pipe, that conversation began again. The tenor, excellent fellow, was secretly longing for his own cosey nest and the dutiful ministrations of his Bertha. But the tie that bound him to Lothnar was one of paramount closeness; he knew himself needed. Only to him would the genius unburden his mind of the hundred and one causes of exasperation which the triumphant performance of his work had produced in him to-night. The bassoon that had been half a second late on the great blast; the flatness of a certain violin passage; the want of perfect unison in the sweeping accompaniment of the seven harps. And Agamemnon —

"Agamemnon leaves me singularly doubtful. The *Kerl* lacks classic dignity: he remains German. A German paterfamilias! *Na*, he was nervous, as you say. . . . But that Volga! Why did I ever have her? She is Italian and of the worst traditions! It's in her blood,

Friedel . . . she sang to the audience, she sang to the grand-ducal box. She sang as if she had been at La Scala. *Donnerwetter!* what is that you say? The voice? I'll grant you the voice . . . rich, rolling out like Burgundy, strong and dark. . . . *Ach*, she could be tragic — the slut! But she'd rather be Covent Garden! I'll never make her creature of mine. . . . She'll never fit into my scheme. . . . She'll have to march. Hearest thou, Friedel — march! . . . March she shall."

Amid clouds of Kanaster smoke, he leaned his pale face forward, twitching with anger, lined with the arduous work and concentration of months. His voice had a sharp tone. Anxious to lead the overstrained mind into more pleasant thought, Reinhardt paused in the midst of his second *Seidel* of beer to murmur soothingly that "Iphigenia had been perfect."

"Iphigenia!" echoed Lothnar. He fell back in his chair, dropped his pipe on the table, and remained silent, with fixed gaze. Then his moustaches twitched with a smile. "*Ach, die*. . . . Yes, that one is all mine. I can make of her what I please. . . . That is as it must be."

Holding his glass poised on the way to his lips, Reinhardt turned his clear eyes full upon his Master.

"But I?" he said, uplifting his Viking head, with an unconscious pride. "But I — I am a free spirit. *Ich bin ein freier geist*."

Lothnar's fierce gaze softened.

"Thou?" he said, with a chuckle. "As thou art, thou

art dear to me." Then sardonic laughter shook him. "Free? Poor soul . . . your little fat wife could pop you into her oven, if she had a fancy to see you brown!" He leaned deeper back into his chair and drove his fingers into his forked beard. "Women," he growled, "women are the Devil."

CHAPTER XIII

UP INTO the meagre bedroom, the bare-armed Tienchen brought a basket of roses, the sight of which almost made Sarolta's heart stop beating. She was still in bed, though it was past ten o'clock; but she thought that she might henceforth brave Frau Hegemann's rules. Last night might still seem a dream, the future might still be wrapped in mystery: nevertheless, between the Sarolta of yesterday and the Sarolta of to-day there lay a difference so enormous that even her child nature could not ignore it. She knew now she was of those whom fate had picked out to rule; and knew it as truly as if she had been born on the steps of a throne.

So she had lain in bed, and ordered her coffee and *brödchen* to be sent up to her! This return to the independent ways of Paris was the first sweet of her great triumph, and she was tasting it luxuriously, when yet another followed in quick succession — the roses!

"*Prachtvoll!*" said Tienchen, dumping them on the bed. Then she caught up the tray and departed.

Magnificent they were; Sarolta lay and contemplated them. Deep, crimson, glowing things, with a scent so rich as to be almost too much to bear. Such roses as a lover would offer to his beloved! From the moment that her eyes had caught sight of them, a wild thought had

sprung into her brain. Was anything too beautiful, or too astounding to be real now? Who but one indeed in all Frankheim would dare to send flowers to her at Frau Hegemann's — in all Frankheim, save he who hitherto had sternly prohibited any such tribute? And if they were from him! . . . She hardly dared inhale the intoxicating fragrance; hardly dared pursue a thought so fraught with unbelievable joy. Yet he had caught her to his soul last night, with a look, with words of intimate spiritual union; and if she might be that to him — something that his soul caressed, what more could she ask of life?

She put out her hand and timidly touched a velvet petal; and as she did so the thought came upon her: might she not discover a card, a letter perhaps, hidden among the glory. She sat up, scarlet-cheeked; and, true enough, there was the corner of a white envelope visible between the crimson and the green! Again that sensation, as if her heart had stopped beating, came upon her as she drew it out.

But the first glance at the bold, black handwriting brought a revulsion of feeling so keen that she could have screamed like an angry child. It was Johnny! . . . only Johnny! She flung the letter, unopened, from her. Had she not forbidden him to approach her? How dared he thrust himself upon her!

It was upon this storm of angry disappointment that Madame Costanza and Sady broke into her room.

"Roses!" cried madame, halting midway, with her histrionic gesture. "That could not fail! Aha, little prima donna, have a care! Roses have thorns, sometimes.

And how did they pass the sentry? It was as much as the Hegemann would do to let us up the stairs! '*Gnädige Frau*,' I said, 'you cage the bird. I have nothing against it . . . pretty little birds must have cages — but I taught the bird to chirp; and if you deny me, why then we'll see what Dr. Lothnar . . .'" She interrupted her rapid flow with a sudden change of tone. "*Ah ça*, Sady, but what's the matter with her?"

"I don't know," said Sady, slowly. She was standing uncomfortably by Sarolta's bed, holding her inert hand.

Sarolta, who had tried to smile welcome at their entrance, had now, somehow, so much trouble to keep herself from tears that any attempt at looking cheerful was beyond her power. She sat upright against her little hard pillow, a quivering underlip between her teeth, staring fixedly into space.

"How now," said madame, drawing closer, "so spoilt — so favoured, and yet discontented? But come, come, she's tired, Sady, overwrought. It's very easily understood. I myself, I howled the whole of the first day after my *début*. But then I went sharp on a high A; yes — I who speak to you. *Dieu*, how that A pursued me: a demon with a little prong, my dears! Sady, lift off that tribute, that I may embrace the child. The old *maman* is very proud of thee; *va, ma petite*. *Eh bien, quoi?* Cry on the old one's neck if you like. Yes, cry; it does good."

But there is nothing more styptic to emotion than such encouragement. Sarolta gave two or three little sobs against the large, comfortable shoulder offered to her,

then found, surprisedly, that she did not want to cry after all.

"You think Dr. Lothnar is satisfied?" she faltered.

She had had his intimate assurance that he was so; but, after the fashion of the feminine heart, she hungered for more.

"Satisfied?" screamed the lady, taking the question in a general sense. "When was that master ever satisfied? I saw Reinhardt this morning. He tells me they sat up all night, and that there was not one instrument nor a passage it played, from beginning to end, which the extraordinary being did not discuss, dissect, find fault with. And, by the way, you are to have a new *maman* Clytemnestra for the next performance, and Reinhardt says you may be summoned any hour to-morrow to rehearse her. Yes, la Volga goes. Volga, with that voice of glory! The only contralto in the world; has any one heard such folly?"

Sarolta went white to the lips.

"Did Reinhardt say nothing about me?" she faltered.

Sady, for once quicker-witted than Madame Costanza, flung herself upon her friend's bed.

"About you, honey!—I should think he did! My word! . . . Iphigenia, the gem of the whole thing! Why, you're in everybody's mouth. Fact is, I believe you have made that opera. Madame may say what she likes . . . 'tis a bit beyond most people's comprehension. But, from the moment you came—you darling, little white thing, with your darling sweet voice, and the pity of you, and the prettiness of you, and the real right-down human

nature of you — why, you were Iphigenia! There, honey, I can't speak of it. But you should hear Reinhardt. And even old grizzly says — ”

She paused in her vehement hugging of Sarolta to fling a sidelong, mischievous look through her fabulous lashes at her singing mistress. When did the latter ever fail to rise to an opportunity for dramatic effect?

“Old grizzly?” she cried in her deepest notes.

“It's just a little name I've got for Dr. Lothnar, ma'am,” said the American demurely.

“Ah, I breathe,” said madame. “I thought perhaps, behind my back — ”

Sady's outcry was arrested by Sarolta, who caught her friend pettishly by the wrist.

“What did he say? What did Dr. Lothnar say of me?”

“Well, Herr Reinhardt said that Dr. Lothnar had been entirely satisfied only with two of his interpreters — you and himself.”

Sady felt she spoke flatly; but the depressing impression she had received last night, from the moment she had come into Sarolta's presence, was increasing upon her. It had been an ardently longed-for meeting; but the realization was full of disillusion. Sarolta had shown no gladness to see her; she hardly wanted to kiss her back, Sady felt; she had not asked a single question except about herself; she was absorbed, and in her absorption the old affection seemed to have no place.

Sady slid from the bed, and feigned to be engaged in straightening the roses. Madame's dry comment:

"Lothnar satisfied with his two chief interpreters. . . . *Eh bien, plaignez-le,*" fell upon deaf ears. Sarolta, with clasped hands, was lost in the contentment of an appreciation which placed her on a par with Friedhelm Reinhardt, with the *du* of Lothnar's artist soul.

"Of course, poor Johnny gave you these," said Sady presently, in a tone of exaggerated cheerfulness. "He supped with us last night. Why — this is his letter, ain't it?" She picked up the despised document that lay, face upward, on the floor. "You haven't even opened it, you hard-hearted little wretch!"

"I don't want to," said Sarolta. "I told him not to plague me here."

She spoke with a cruel setting of white teeth, but, after all, the passion of anger had gone from her. Had not Lothnar given her something better than roses?

"That poor Sir John," said madame, sitting down weightily upon Sarolta's solitary chair — "one must pity him, all the same!" She laid a handsome, ungloved hand upon the counterpane, regarded her sparkling rings reflectively, and sighed.

"You need not accept him, my child," she said then, with sudden gravity. "But you need not despise him either. A faithful, humble love! *Allez*, it is not a bad thing to have it at the back of one's life. For this is a very treacherous world, my little one, as kings and queens and artists find out sooner than most."

Sarolta shifted her head irritably, without reply.

"You may read the tiresome letter. I won't," she said evasively to Sady.

"Read another's love-letter!" screamed madame.

"Then tear it up!" said Sarolta.

"I guess I'd better read it," said Sady, in her pretty, quiet way. She broke open the envelope, perused, and gave a sudden little mocking laugh. "Listen, Sarolta!"

"Read a love-letter aloud!" again protested Madame Costanza, deep-chested. But Sady proceeded:

"MY DEAR MISS VANECK, — I came to hear the opera. I hope you don't mind. Everybody was coming. I liked it awfully. I thought you awfully good. I wonder if you'd come to tea with me to-day. I hear there's a place where they do you awfully well in the Park. I'm going to ask Madame Costanza and Miss Schreiber. Rather like the old days in Paris — what? I should be awfully bucked up if you came.

"Yours very sincerely,

"JOHN HOLDFAST.

"P.S. The name of the café is *Schöne Aussicht* — I hope I've got it right. I forgot to say I've got a godmother with me. Her name is Lady Caroline Pountney. She hopes you'll come."

Sady paused.

"'I thought you awf'ly good' . . . 'I thought you awf'ly good!'" said madame, in a rich, sing-song imitation of Johnny's accent. "Oh, *ces Anglais!* Well, my dear, with that lover you have my permission to spend a month on a desert island!"

"I won't go to his tea," snapped Sarolta. She was slightly out of countenance over the unardent contents of the scorned letter; Madame overruled her peremptorily:

"Ta-ta-ta! — Of course you'll go. And so shall I.

And so will Sady. It will do us all good. I know that *Schöne Aussicht*; we shall have Russian tea and *Mandelnküchen*. I would have gone to the Altschloss, but Reinhardt says not a cat must go near the Master to-day! He went to bed at six o'clock this morning."

With one of her extraordinary explosions of vitality, the great lady here gave vent to a most unexpected and piercing scream

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!* Idiot that I am!" She thumped her solid chest, rose from her chair, and rushed for the door.

"Sakes alive, madame!" said Sady, startled into the use of an exclamation once familiar to her childish ears, "what's happened?"

"The papers!" shrieked Costanza. "To think I have not yet seen a single paper. — The *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the *Münchener Allgemeine*, the *Tageblatt* — they'll all be coming in now, besides their local 'cabbage leaves.' Sady, my lamb, let us run, run. We will return to the prima donna in a minute. Ah, heaven, your first press-notices — does not that spell life!"

If one's first press-notices spelt life, waiting for them was, Sarolta found, a very unpleasant process. Lothnar, and Lothnar only, had hitherto bounded her horizon; she had scarcely cast a thought upon the opinion of the rest of the world. And now, indeed, it was more with reference to him that she dreaded the perusal of criticisms. Should she be here condemned, mocked at, belittled, how then would it be with him?

The two beaming faces that, after an intolerable delay, shone once more into her room, dispelled her sick anxiety at one glance. It hardly needed Sady's tremulous congratulations, or madame's full-blooded chant: "*Io Triumphe!*"

"You are made! You have arrived, my dear," cried that lady, scattering newspapers broadcast.

Then, unexpectedly, even to herself, Sarolta's soul was filled with disdain. She smiled without replying. Had she not already received the only testimony she cared for? Did it need a German paper to tell her that she had succeeded?

"God forgive me," thought the music-mistress, "the little one is already beyond herself!"

Sir John Holdfast's tea party at the *Schöne Aussicht* duly took place. He secured the whole of the small veranda. The June weather was glorious; the Russian tea was all that was expected; the *Sandtorten* and *Mandelnküchen* upheld their reputation; Sady declared that the raspberries and cream were beyond dreams — and Sady was a connoisseur. All his guests moreover, appeared, including an unexpected one in the shape of Chopin Mosenthal, brought by Madame Costanza.

This lady herself arrived at the rendezvous in a heated, panting condition, but in high good-humour. She was so full of the news she had to impart that beyond a side-fling, "*Bonjour, madame,*" she took little notice of Lady Caroline when Johnny ceremoniously introduced them to each other. Lady Caroline instantly conceived a

strong dislike to the genial artist; and included in her disfavour the long, slender, dark lad, whose black curls actually fell over his face when he bowed — which he did with preposterous frequency. When she discovered that he called Sarolta by her Christian name, and further beheld him sitting by her side, holding her hand, she instantly and irrevocably decided that Johnny was not going to marry into “that crew”; — not if she could help it.

Johnny himself was not very comfortable in his mind over this familiarity, though he was mighty scornful with his godmother on the subject later on, protesting that one would have “to be jolly silly” to attach importance to a cousin.

It was madame who thrust the young violinist into the chair beside Sarolta.

“Sit down, Chopin,” she ordered in the middle of his third bow. Then she followed suit herself; gave a jovial “*Oh, là, là!*” and burst into her news:

“None of you will guess where I have been . . . *tais-toi*, Chopin. . . . My friends, I come from the Altschloss!” Seeing no enlightenment in Lady Caroline’s severe gaze, nor in Sir John Holdfast’s blank one, she proceeded with gusto: “To Lothnar! I have been to Lothnar! He sent for me; what do you think of that?”

Sarolta dropped her eyes on her plate, and, becoming aware of her cousin’s affectionate clasp, twitched her hand away with a pettish: “Don’t, Chop!” (To such base uses do we come. Thus, in the Mosenthal household, had that revered name degenerated!) It was only Sady, after

all, who expressed due excitement. But Madame Costanza required no outward stimulus: her appreciation of the rich drama of life was innate.

"Yes, he sent for me, and you will never guess what for . . . to offer me — me!" she struck her bosom with an open palm — "the part of Clytemnestra! Conceive it! . . . And the most comic of it all is that for two minutes . . . two minutes! I was on the very point of consent.— *Ah, ce Lothnar!* What a way he has! One is never quite one's self with him. Born to make the world march, *celui-là!* But *celle-ci* will not march with him, after all. 'It's settled, then,' he says. 'Settled?' I cry. 'Nothing is settled but that you are mad, and I very nearly so. No — no, my friend,' I said to him; 'I grant you that I would not make you a bad Clytemnestra. *Ah, pour ça, non.* The whole world would have talked of it. But, *saperlipopette!* I have my work, you have yours. I found my vocation just as you found your own, Herr Doctor. You take, you absorb. *Gut!* . . . *Hab' nichts dagegen!* I, I give, my friend. While you draw everything into yourself, I am putting bits of my spirit into a thousand lives. Well, that pleases me — that is my existence. I am not going to cut it short, even for a space, for you. And I am too good a mother.' Is it not so, my chicks?" She beamed from Sarolta to Sady. "I'm not the kind of old hen to cast the poor little *poussins* adrift."

Here she paused, and suddenly addressed Lady Caroline: "A brooding hen, madame, that's what I am — and that's what I shall be till I die. Thank God," — she gave

a jolly laugh — “I have big wings, and the supply of eggs doesn’t run short, I assure you, and —— ”

Lady Caroline put up her eyeglasses, surveyed the speaker through them, and dropped them.

“What a terribly vulgar woman!” was her unspoken comment.

“Well, what’s the matter with her, that one?” was Madame Costanza’s.

“Oh, madame, what did Dr. Lothnar say?” put in Sady, in a thrilled voice. Sady was nothing if not tactful.

“*Ma chère!* you remember when Wotan kills with just one look? He looked at me like that. Sometimes I think he believes he is Jupiter! But I am not dead. I offered him Clare Voysey. I thought he would have torn me in two! ‘What!’ he cries, ‘the creature that had a mouth like a cavern when I came in to you that day in Paris!’ (He has a memory like no one, that man!) ‘Well,’ I said, ‘are you not chasing Volga because she makes her *petite bouche*?’ ‘I will have Maria Seidel. Maria Seidel . . . that’s what it will be!’ says he. My poor ugly Clare has a thousand times better voice, and so I told him. And Maria Seidel is as mad as a hatter. ‘Mad,’ he says, with his twisted smile. ‘Then we shall get on.’ I don’t know,” said the great voice trainer reflectively, “that he is altogether wrong. Maria has temperament — temperament,” she repeated thoughtfully. “What she has got of temperament — enough for twenty! Too much, far too much for one. She makes every place hot.” Suddenly madame

began to chuckle. "I said to her one day, 'Maria, no one will want *chauffage central* where you are!'"

"Johnny," said Lady Caroline, in cuttingly distinct tones, "will you kindly ask the waiter for more water?—Can I offer you another cup of tea, Madame Costanza? Do you like this caravan tea? Some people cannot drink any other."

The diversion was hardly as successful as it deserved. Madame Costanza was quite as ready to discuss tea as any other subject, but it led to a thrilling description of her suffering in connection with the ordinary English brew.

"*Ce que ça vous abîme l'estomac!*" she began.

Johnny saw that his friends were making a hopelessly bad impression. It worried him a little on the surface, because he liked people to get on; but it made him, if possible, more determined than ever on his life's purpose. He had not been quite sure whether he would make another attempt to plead his cause during this visit. It was not a good moment—even he could see that. But it was horrible to think of going away and leaving Sarolta surrounded by such strange people—the mad lady with the temperament, the man who fancied he was Jupiter, the curly-haired young artist who bowed and gesticulated and dared familiarly to address his beloved Sarolta . . . and hold her hand.

And now they were talking about the Press Notices, and quoting them, one against the other, Sady and the violinist. Johnny ground his teeth.

"*A more exquisite virginal apparition it is impossible to*

conceive. . . .” said Chopin Mosenthal, beginning to read from a folded newspaper.

“Oh, but the *Münchener*,” interrupted Sady. “Did you see that? ‘*Perfect embodiment of Iphigenia . . . The young débutante’s very immaturity adding to the pathos. . . .*’”

“I didn’t like that one,” cut in Sarolta, and Sady halted, flushing. She had not seen anything wounding in the notice, which had gone on to say that the youthful singer’s artlessness and want of experience were actual assets in her favour, in the present part, and that the world might look forward to greater and greater achievements from her when her voice should have ripened and come to its full power.

To Sady it had seemed that these words, from one of the most important German papers, were more encouraging than the indiscriminate praise of lesser journals. It had not dawned upon her that twenty-year-old Sarolta could already esteem herself as beyond improvement because of one night’s success.

She fell into silence, her delicate face unwontedly grave. The little comrade she had loved and “mothered” all those merry days in Paris seemed somehow lost to her. She caught young Chopin’s eyes fixed upon her with a humorous understanding in them.

“Well, Sarolta,” he said then, addressing his cousin with the Mosenthal frankness: “Oughtn’t you to be precious glad, my dear, that you’re not mature yet? When papers begin to talk of a voice as mature, it’s pretty sure to be nearly rotten.”

Lady Caroline here thought that she had borne enough. She rose from her seat, and the whole group went down together into the sunlit garden. Every one was glad of the move.

Johnny's tea party had not been an unmitigated success.

As Sarolta passed along the terrace there was an interested stir among two or three groups of comfortable German families drinking beer at the little round tables. Her name was ejaculated right and left, in no whispers; and the solid Teuton stare followed her with undisguised curiosity.

Johnny, casting scowls about him, hurried to her side. He would have given something to be allowed to teach "those fellows" how to behave. All he could do was to slip his stalwart person between her and the more intrusive gazers. Sarolta went, her head high, with an air of sublime indifference. But the hawk's-eyes of Madame Costanza had mirth in them, not unmixed with a little pity, as she watched her whilom pupil. She pressed Sady's hand:

"Look at her, *la pauvre petite!*"

Where the roads diverged by the great fountains, Lady Caroline paused, and, with a sudden access of fine-lady urbanity, bade a condescending farewell to Madame Costanza. Then she addressed Sarolta.

"Good-bye! So very interesting to have met you. I feel sure you have a brilliant future before you. I hope one day we may hear you at Covent Garden in Italian Opera. By the way, Lady Warborough asked me to tell

you that she would be glad if you would go to see her. She is at the Park Hotel. I asked her to join us here to-day; but she was due at the Grand-Duchess's. Good-bye again. I'm going away to-morrow. Perhaps we may meet when . . . you come to sing at Covent Garden. Johnny!"

Johnny stood facing his godmother; his hat was a trifle at the back of his head; his legs were planted slightly apart; his face was singularly expressionless. He might not be very brilliant, but he knew, as he told himself wrathfully, "what the old girl was up to," and it added just another rivet to his resolve. For an appreciable moment there was silence in the little group; and then the young man said in good-humoured, off-hand tones:

"I'll see you to a cab, if you want to go back."

"Oh, no, Johnny dear," said Lady Caroline with equal cheerfulness and determination, "you'll see me home, if you please. And you've got to pack for to-morrow morning, you know."

Johnny gave a not unhumorous thought to those railway and opera tickets for which he had himself so readily paid; then, as if she had not spoken, he repeated in the same everyday, pleasant voice:

"I'll see you to a cab."

The situation was becoming a little strained. Lady Caroline's black eyes flashed fire. "Ungrateful boy!" thought she, "after my coming all this way, in the very middle of the season, and sitting through that dreadful opera, all because of his idiotic infatuation for that impossible girl! I'm too good-natured."

Madame Costanza did not speak; she looked on, amused. And the young things held their tongues as was becoming. The tension was relieved by an unexpected encounter.

A small dapper man in a gray summer suit swung up to them along the path with a military freedom of gait. He hesitated at sight of the group, paused, and took off his hat.

"*Mon Dieu — c'est Sir Pringle!*" exclaimed Madame Costanza.

"My dear madame — why, Lady Caroline!" cried the newcomer. "Ah, my dear child — give me both your hands. I must congratulate you — I must indeed! It was superb, wasn't it? I confess I take a little pride. . . . As I said to Lady Warborough just now at the Grand-Duchess's: 'She was always my best pupil!' I have left my little tribute at your apartments, Sarolta — I may still call you Sarolta? — with a few words, just a few words of appreciation. Lady Caroline, I caught a glimpse of you last night. No, not quite our style of music — a bit mad, you know, but that's the fashion. And there are fine things, now and then, very fine things. I'm just taking a stroll back to the hotel through the Park. Which way — ah — are you all going?"

Here John Holdfast accomplished what he many a time told himself afterward was one of the sharpest things he had ever done in his life.

"If you are going that way, Sir Arnold," he said, "will you see Lady Caroline to a cab? — She wants to get back, and I am on for a bit of a walk."

"De-lighted, of course," said Sir Arnold with a blank look toward the two pretty girls and Madame Costanza's broadly smiling face.

"Thank you, Sir Arnold," said Lady Caroline, with much dignity. "I shall be obliged if you will accompany me. . . . In a strange town, at the mercy of the first ruffianly cabman that comes along, I confess I do *not* like to be left to drive alone."

Madame Costanza remained motionless till the couple, neither of whom could conceal dudgeon, had disappeared. Then she gave her expressive chuckle:

"'My best pupil . . . !'" she mimicked. "'I confess I take some little pride!'" She lifted her voice and sang a soft *yodel*, and then began again, with mock emphasis:

"A little birch tree shimmered in the wood . . .

She loved the mighty oak that beside her stood. . . !

"'Not quite our style of music — eh, Lady Caroline?'"

Chopin Mosenthal exploded, schoolboy fashion, doubling up in ecstasy till his black curls almost swept his knee. Sady, caught by the infection of his mirth, stood looking at him, laughing gaily, without understanding the full point of the joke.

Sarolta walked impatiently away. Everybody was tiresome to-day, she thought. She felt irritated all over; but the real soreness lay in the knowledge that Madame Costanza had been summoned by Lothnar; that Reinhardt had sat with him all night; and that she had had not even a little message.

Johnny saw his opportunity and hurried after her. He

knew, before he spoke that he was doing himself no good — yea, even damaging his cause. Yet speak he must; it seemed to him that his very loyalty demanded it. Every moment he passed in Frankheim showed him more clearly the odiousness of the career she had chosen, and her unfitness for it.

“Sarolta — you can’t go on with this!” he burst out. “It will kill you. You’re looking ill already. You’ve grown quite thin, you know. It’s unbearable. Oh, I say, don’t you see, don’t you understand? It’s dreadful for a woman, for a lady . . . Sarolta, it’s not because I’m thinking of myself, ’pon honour, it isn’t. I’m thinking of you. If you’d let me take you out of it, you could do anything you liked. I’d not ask for myself. I’d be content. . . .”

He choked. She allowed him to speak uninterrupted; then, standing before him, gave him, between narrowed lids, one single glance of icy contempt; and, turning on her heel, ran back to Madame Costanza without a word.

Johnny stared after her a second or two, then lifted his hat vaguely and walked away toward the Park gates with great strides.

So he packed his boxes that night after all — to Lady Caroline’s dry triumph. But before he left, he had a long conversation with Sady, which sent him on his travels less disconsolate than he would otherwise have been.

Nevertheless, though Sady promised and comforted, she was herself by no means happy about Sarolta, and

ventured to hint to madame some of her reasons for anxiety. That doughty lady, however, was breezily optimistic:

"Changed? Of course she is changed. What do you expect her to be? She's going through a phase, my dear; she'll come out of it again soon enough — soon enough. When the hard work begins once more, and she learns that the artist's career does not stop at its first stage, and that it's not all roses, and laurels, and orchids! — Eh, eh! did you see Sir Pringle's orchids? — All this soap-bubble nonsense will float away, and you'll find the real Sarolta again underneath. *Eh, mon Dieu*, leave her to her little triumphs! The disillusion will come soon enough!"

"It's not that, madame," faltered Sady, her pretty forehead puckered into thoughtful lines. "She's — oh, I don't know how to explain — she's not happy, not triumphant, in spite of her success. She seems in a kind of a dream all the time, and there's only one thing she wants to talk about — "

"Iphigenia, I suppose," said Madame Costanza cheerfully.

"No," said Sady in a very low voice — "Dr. Lothnar, madame."

The other gave a cry of derision.

"Lothnar — is that what you are afraid of, my poor child? Of course she's in love with Lothnar. She would not be a human girl in this town if she wasn't. *Mon Dieu!* Have I not been in love in the same way from sixteen upward? Did I not cherish a peach-stone from the plate of Gayarré? Did I not think of a big panful

of charcoal because Rubinstein gave his photograph to my rival? Did I not — pooh, you're a little Puritan, Sady — you came back in the *Mayflower*. *Lass es schwärmen!* It is quite good for the art, she'll have many another."

Sady laughed, and tried to seem convinced, and to convince herself. But when she, in her turn, steamed away from Frankheim — they waited for the second performance, Madame Costanza taking a hostile professional interest in Maria Seidel's Clytemnestra — the girl carried away an unwonted weight of despondency. "Sarolta was glad to see me go!" she said to herself, and the tears she would not shed before madame seemed to be dropping inwardly upon her anxious heart.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE was little change in the Hegemannsche Haus for the next week or so. The increased liberty which had come to Sarolta from the night of her *début* continued. Flowers were often sent to her from unknown admirers; and letters, some of which — the appreciation of kindly artists — she proudly kept; others she had the good sense to tear up and fling away as hardly worth even a thought of anger. She saw Lothnar again during the necessary rehearsals with the new Clytemnestra, but these were conducted on purely business lines. She had no conversation with him, except a word or two on the second night of "Iphigenia," which left her singularly depressed. He was in an unwontedly good-humour — whatever impression Maria Seidel had made upon Laura Costanza, her intensity had "satisfied" the composer. On his way out of the theatre, leaning on Reinhardt's arm, he crossed the girl, cloaked and hooded, and ready to start under Fräulein Schwank's escort.

"And one brings flowers to the Iphigenia, does not one?" he said, his eyebrows twitching as they always did when he was in jocular mood.

"Yes," answered Sarolta, crimsoning. A passionate disclaimer of any desire for the forbidden tributes was trembling on her lips, when he interrupted her.

"It is well — it is well. Flowers are sweet. Smell them, Fräulein Sarolta — smell them!"

Her heart had felt like bursting as she walked home along the moonlit street. How far rather would she have been still the vestal whom he "kept close."

It was after the fifth successful performance of "Iphigenia," to a house well-nigh as crowded as the first, that Frau Hegemann disappeared suddenly from the *pension*, and was not seen again for two days. When she returned, her face was distorted by violent weeping. And the rumour spread like wildfire through the house that Lothnar's wife, her niece, was dead. The news was presently confirmed in the local newspapers. The theatre was closed for a week; and when Dr. Lothnar resumed his place as conductor he wore clothes of mourning.

Frau Hegemann was wrapped in *crêpe*, with a veil that swept the pavement, in good national fashion. She looked sourer than ever, and was more silent as she presided at the meals. And often those sunken eyes of hers were red and inflamed from hidden tears.

Sarolta, who had once had an evil thought of gladness to know Lothnar's wife doomed and disfigured, had now no clear understanding of her own feelings upon these death tidings. It seemed to make so extraordinarily little outward difference to any one except Frau Hegemann.

Lothnar, it was true, looked haggard when she first beheld him again in his mourning garments; but that might have been the effect of the black. She had no speech of him then, or for many days afterward; and she soon found herself a prey to a devouring desire to discover

how far his bereavement — if such it could be called — really affected him. Did he mourn her whom he had once loved? Had old memories and old feelings re-awakened in him? Was it merely release? The problem pursued her in the life at once isolated and active that she now led.

At last she ventured to question Reinhardt:

“Did the Master mind?”

The tenor looked at her, surprised, a second; and then said gravely:

“Fräulein Sarolta, there are wounds that the best friend must not probe. The doctor speaks of it not at all.”

Sarolta felt dreadfully snubbed. Nor did Frau Bertha, with whom she was subsequently invited to *Kaffee*, tend to comfort her, though she was loquacious enough. According to her, it was pitiable to behold Lothnar’s grief.

“Not that he talks, *bewahret!*— that was never his way. But I brought little Ulrichchen to see him on his birthday, by invitation, Fräulien Sarolta! *Ach*, I put a band of *crêpe* round the little fellow’s Scotch coat, just as a tribute, you understand. And when the Master saw it, he said: ‘*Pfui*, how ugly is that black! Let at least the poor child be free of it.’ And then he sighed as if his heart was breaking. So changed he is, Fräulien Sarolta.”

Though Bertha Reinhardt had a score of easy friendships, and addressed most of the members of her *Kaffee Klatsch* as “*Schätzchen*,” “*Innig geliebte*” and “*Theuerste*,” Sarolta was still “*Fräulein*” to her. The *Hof-Doktor*’s daughter could not forget the distance between herself and a professional singer.

"Iphigenia" was given twice a week till the middle of August. Though fashionable Frankheimers had gone to their cures, to sea or to mountain, long before, there was still a steady influx of curious visitors from all parts of the world. Indeed, had Lothnar chosen, he could have continued to produce the opera for months to come.

But he did not choose. On the fifteenth of the month, his theatre was closed; he ordered his fellow-workers to go and enjoy holidays, in the same autocratic manner as he set them to their task.

Sarolta, still held in a state of tutelage, found that her summer outing had been arranged for her by Madame Costanza and her aunt. Sady — accompanied for propriety's sake by the Normande — came to fetch her at Frankheim, and the three set off for a little-known, simple health-resort, high up in the Black Forest. There Sarolta was ordered to drink milk and to bask as much as possible in the sunshine. She brought away a great fatigue of body and mind after the strain of the past year, and was glad enough of the enforced rest.

Mrs. Mosenthal had increased her allowance, informing her in a jubilant letter that she had invested a hundred pounds of her salary for her. Sarolta asked no questions; she cared not a jot for such matters.

The girls had scarce been three weeks together, when a telegram summoned Sarolta back to Frankheim. It was brief enough:

"Zürück kommen — Lothnar."

She had spent the days of her *Kur* in a kind of apathy which had been of itself a repose. The milk she drank, the long dreamless sleeps which had replaced her broken nights, and the idleness of her waking hours, had done wonders for her appearance and health. But upon receipt of Lothnar's telegram she became as one who has received a new soul: all her listlessness fell from her. She danced into Sady's room with her news, and, at the latter's open dismay, alternately coaxed and stormed. In fact — just for that hurried day of packing and travelling — Sady found again the impetuous, lovable comrade she thought to have lost forever.

The American sat watching her friend from the opposite seat of the railway-carriage, yearning in almost motherly fashion over her joyful agitation.

"What will be the end of it?" wondered she. "It's more than *Schwärmerei* — it's obsession! She's got that telegram hidden away over her heart, I know — and oh! how pretty she is, and how little able to take care of herself!"

At the station they were met by Friedhelm Reinhardt, beaming as usual kindness and friendship. Sady, who was going on to Paris by the night-express, was delighted to hand over Sarolta to such a safe keeping, and still more pleased when she heard that the Viking had appeared to fetch the girl back to his own home.

"You telegraphed to Frau Hegemann to have your room ready," he said. "Now, I have a little piece of news for you. It is not to the Hegemannsche Haus that you are going, Fräulein Sarolta, it is to ours! (Even

now *das Fräuchen* is nailing up muslin curtains to your bed.) *Na* — that is the Master's wish."

Sarolta's eyes danced. To be near the Altschloss; to be within sound of the horn when it should blow for Friedhelm; within sight of the gilded vanes — what a vision of bliss! Not to speak of pine-forest and torrent to look upon, instead of a mean and dowdy street!

"That is too lovely!" she cried in enthusiasm.

"*Ja, nicht wahr?*" said Friedhelm. "And the little wife will make you comfortable, never fear!"

He chivalrously disguised the fact that the plan had been not altogether welcome to such a cosey and loving couple as they were. As for the girl, the news brought the finishing touch of glamour to a golden day: Lothnar had thought of her; Lothnar had planned this for her!

"I feel as if my feet could sing for joy to touch Frankheim soil again," she whispered fervently to Sady, when they parted.

"Good-bye, honey," said Sady, her eyes filling with tears. She watched the light figure go trippingly by the giant's side all the length of the station, while those tears slowly overflowed. She was past caring now that Sarolta should care so little: it was her friend's high spirits that filled her with unknown foreboding.

As she got back into the railway carriage to the side of the impassive and cow-like Thérèse of Normandy, a vague thought began to take shape in her mind:

"It will end by my coming here for good, to look after her. . . . Meanwhile, I am glad she is with Frau Bertha."

As the jingling droschke drove them slowly across the town, toward the Gate Tower, Friedhelm explained to Sarolta the reason of the sudden recall.

"The Master is going to revive 'Hippolytus.' Of course you have heard, *fräulein*, of that early opera of his? Nay, I remember telling you myself how the failure of it in Berlin nearly killed him. He has been going over the score ever since the production of 'Iphigenia.' And now, I believe there is very little to alter after all. It is a grand work, with I know not what of youth and inspiration in it that may come but once in a lifetime. It has been the first-born child to him, the best-loved of his creations, and — *na*, *fräulein*, you know him; he has had no rest in his heart to think of it as a failure. He to fail, and in what his own genius proclaims as good! But the times were not ripe then. . . . Now they are — he can impose himself."

Sarolta listened intently. Her pulses were throbbing. This was life again after the torpor of those long days — they had seemed so short to Sady! Here she was back in the centre of a mighty activity; nay, she was actually part of it.

"And oh, Herr Reinhardt, he wants me!"

The man smiled down at her.

"We all want you," he said, in his pleasant way, "but — yes, *fräulein*, though the Master does not care that one should discuss his plans, it is after all no secret: he thinks of you for his Phædra."

"His Phædra!" repeated Sarolta, clasping her hands, as if holding something precious and dear.

Phædra! Sarolta knew as little of her as once she had known of Iphigenia, but she told herself that if it was to be another rôle of sacrifice like that of Agamemnon's daughter, how she would rejoice in it!

Frau Bertha received her with reserve, but thawed perceptibly over the unaffected rapture the girl expressed at sight of the little room, smelling of soap and turpentine, perfect as a daisy in its simplicity, snowy with the freshest muslin curtains it is possible to imagine — a contrast, indeed to the gloomy meagreness of the Hegemannsche chambers. When Frau Bertha should have gone, and she was free to let in the trees and the torrent, Sarolta felt that she would have no desire left.

Before she went down to supper, she heard with an indescribable leap of the heart, the long wild call of the horn across the darkening space, across the roar of the waters, the chant of the pines.

"I am too happy!" she said to herself.

But she found Frau Bertha, not unnaturally cross at a summons which robbed her of her Friedhelm's company at such a moment. Something he had said to her before he departed had likewise ruffled her. "That girl upstairs, she has grown charmingly pretty, has she not? *Reizend hübsch!*"

Sarolta was not destined to meet Lothnar for another week. She received orders to learn, and rehearse with Reinhardt, Phædra's first scene with Hippolytus. It began to dawn upon her that she was on probation, after all. And at the conclusion of several rehearsals, she could see that Reinhardt himself doubted whether the

part were suited to her. Nay, it became clear that, in spite of his encouraging words on the evening of her arrival, he scarcely wished her success.

"It is a very hateful character, Fräulein Sarolta," he said to her one day. "I cannot conceive why the master should think of you for it. It is no *rôle* for a young girl like you. *Ach!* it would do you no harm to rest on your Iphigenia for a little while; and that, you know, will be repeated from time to time for many years."

Here, Sarolta, almost as much to her own surprise as to his, burst into tears, and he ventured no further word on the subject. She had herself realized it was a hateful character. The German adapter had brought into the Greek tragedy a certain element of human responsibility which robbed it of its antique simplicity, and the sense of a divinely ordained doom. She could not feel herself Phædra. The words and music, with their evil passion and strength, could not be expressed by that pure voice of hers, so as to sound in the least convincing, even in her own ears.

"The Master has made a mistake," said Reinhardt to his wife. "Everything about the child is too innocent for the part."

"It is, *überhaupt*, no career for a well-brought-up young woman," said Frau Bertha sententiously.

CHAPTER XV

AT LAST the order came that Lothnar was expecting them. Sarolta, as she and Reinhardt walked up together to the dilapidated portals of the Altschloss, was sick with apprehension.

"*Aber*, Fräulein Sarolta . . ." the tenor expostulated, feebly enough, at sight of her white face. Sarolta knew that he wished her out of it, and the resentment this knowledge caused in her was perhaps what saved her from being altogether paralyzed by nervousness.

Lothnar was waiting for them with Webel. He showed all that fierce impatience to get to the music which she had learned to understand.

"Late, late!" was his sole greeting; and then, ere there was a moment for excuse or expostulation, he exclaimed: "*Na*, you are panting. . . you have hurried. . . a pretty preparation for singing!"

With his unalterable sweetness of temper, Reinhardt merely smiled; he unbuttoned his frock-coat, then spread the scores on the music-stand.

It was Hippolytus who opened proceedings, to Sarolta's relief. But it seemed to her that never had Reinhardt's voice sounded so lifeless. But with rapidly beating heart, trembling as she stood, she waited for the moment when Phædra breaks in with her wild cry of

passion. She knew she struck the first notes with unfaltering attack; the spirit of defiance had sprung up out of the very centre of her terror. As she sang, she felt anger increase upon her. How monstrous it would be if Reinhardt, from some supersentimental German notion, were to spoil this vital chance for her. As if the artist should not be above such pettiness! Had not Lothnar himself said to her, "You must put your spirit where I will?" What — she, Sarolta, to be out of his dearest work? That was a thought unendurable.

Upon a ringing note, Lothnar, who had been sitting with his hand shading his eyes, sprang to his feet, and with one movement, cast the two music-desks on the floor. Sarolta stared aghast; in the heat of the fighting mood that had held her as she sang, she had felt elated, confident; never had her voice sounded better to herself, but upon her the Master's fury fell:

"Does one sing Phædra as if one was scolding? How is it possible? Do you again not know the story? Have you no wits in your head to understand the words? — You love him, you are pleading for his love — a guilty love, comprehend that — and you want to make him feel, him . . . Hippolytus, the dedicate, Artemis's pure hunter . . . Hippolytus the clean-souled, that your love is greater than sin — sweeter than honour — a deeper necessity than truth!"

"With all respect, Master," said Reinhardt firmly, "that is what such a maiden as Fräulein Sarolta can never understand."

"So!" Lothnar turned with a long-drawn snarl, and it

was the beloved tenor who now came under the searing wrath of the blue eyes. "That is your opinion, is it? And let me tell you that you're just as bad to-day as she is, you're singing Hippolytus as if he was Joseph — *was?* *Ach*," cried the genius, flinging his arms aloft and shaking them at the painted ceiling. "This is doom. . . this is fate! My Hippolytus, the treasure of my soul . . . thou, thou, to fail me! . . . Patience! Patience!"

He cast himself in his chair, and ran his fingers through his hair. But in a second he was up again, as if moved by springs. And facing the two, who stood tongue-tied, almost like chidden children:

"Is it possible," he burst forth again, "that you cannot see, that you cannot feel! What! I plunge you into the heart of a storm, and my thunder does not peal into your soul, my lightning does not flash into your vision! . . . You, girl, look at him! Look at him, I say, not at me! . . . Is he not tall? Is he not strong and disdainful? Is he not a man to waste a woman's heart within her for longing? *Ach*, maiden, maiden you may be, but it is of maidens that women are made. Look at him! I tell you that he is beautiful, if you don't see it — all Friedhelm Reinhardt as he is! Forget that he is Friedhelm Reinhardt, that you are Fräulein . . . Fräulein, *ach was!* What matters it? Be Phædra!"

"*Aber, bester Meister*, . . ." pleaded Reinhardt, the scarlet rushing to his handsome face.

"Look at him!" shouted Lothnar again, bearing down the interruption with a stamp of his foot.

If the giant was scarlet, Sarolta had turned white to the lips. She was bewildered; beyond words terrified. Herr Webel sat like an unwound automaton, staring straight at his score.

As suddenly as it had come upon him, Lothnar's passion here passed away.

"Pick up the music-stands, Friedel," he said quite gently. "Fräulein Sarolta, sit down for a little while; it is best I should put Hippolytus through his part first. Now, old Kerl, do it again, for me. *Ach*, from that grandeur — 'O Mother Earth . . . O Sun that makest clean!' — Come, thou twin soul of mine, give forth my fire."

Friedhelm answered to this call as to a trumpet blast. He sang and seemed to leap to the height of his art with one superb spring. When he paused for Phædra's answering cry, the girl half rose from her seat, not knowing what was expected of her. Lothnar gave her a swift look, held her a moment swaying as it were on his own doubt, and then, with a gesture, cast her back. He turned to Friedhelm and held out his hands.

"Eh, Webel," he cried over his shoulder, "what do you say to that?"

"A magnificence," said Webel, without moving.

The contrast between the man's manner and the extravagance of his words brought a laugh to both Lothnar and his tenor that made a pleasant diversion in the room.

"I'll have no more from thee to-day," said the Master, and once again he wheeled round upon Sarolta. "*Na*,

little Iphigenia. . . ” At the genial sound of the words she lifted her eyes, full of a sudden hope. “Is it so hard for you to change into a Phædra? What if I were to put you through it myself? A little rehearsal, just you and I together . . . How would that go?”

‘She stood with parted lips, scarcely able to credit the happy promise after the hopelessness and the sense of failure. Friedhelm, disapproving as he was of the part for her, could not refrain from smiling.

“She is undoubtedly becoming quite extraordinarily pretty,” he thought, once again, in his brotherly way.

“Come to-morrow then, child, soon after ten.” Lothnar spoke in the same benevolent, unwontedly gentle manner.

Sarolta took tone and look to her heart, as a memory of never-to-be-forgotten sweetness. “He likes me. In spite of all, he trusts me!” It seemed to her almost as much bliss as she could ever want in life.

“And I?” asked Reinhardt jocosely. “Are you still afraid I shall make an oratorio of it?”

“Bah!” said Lothnar, striking him on the shoulder. “*Bist ja, mein Hippolytus*. I believe thou wast playing thy little trick upon me, lest I should take thee too much as a matter of course.”

“Never have I seen him in better cheer,” said Friedhelm to his companion, as they went light-heartedly homeward through the golden woods. “And yet, at the beginning—brrrr, Fräulein Sarolta, it was squally weather, was it not?”

"And after all," said Sarolta, not without a point of indignation in her voice, "he does not think me so incapable of learning the *rôle*."

Friedhelm looked down at her thoughtfully.

"To teach you himself. . . ." he murmured. "Never have I known him do that for any one. It is a great honour."

"Yes, it is a great honour," said Sarolta softly.

"And it is true," proceeded Reinhardt, after a pause, "never will he find again so pure a soprano, *fräulein*. And it has gained in power. I noticed that to-day."

It was reserved for Frau Reinhardt to cast a damper on the two singers' satisfaction.

"What," she exclaimed—"Fräulein Sarolta to go . . . alone. . . to the Schloss to-morrow! A young lady under my care, to be alone in the company of a gentleman! Dr. Lothnar is still a man in the prime of life, and he a widower now! What will Frau Hegemann say? What will all Frankheim think of me?"

Sarolta sat stiffly, holding her foaming coffee-cup. Scarlet-cheeked and furious, she could not tell her hostess to her face that hers was a horrid little mind; but this was what she wanted to tell her.

"Ah, thou, my love," soothed Reinhardt unmoved, "with thy court education thou wilt never understand the simple ways of artists."

CHAPTER XVI

"LOOK at me," said Lothnar.

He was sitting at one of the pianos, in the odd great music-room, and Sarolta was standing beside him. The two were alone. So had he said: "Look at me," upon that first afternoon at the Schloss when he had told her the story of Iphigenia. The memory of that hour suddenly flooded her.

"I am Agamemnon, and thou art my child, my beloved." Was he going to tell her in similar fashion the story of Phædra? But that story she knew.

She looked at him as he bade her, there was a sudden shrinking within her, a distaste, almost an anger. She wanted, even more passionately than on that bygone day, to be chosen again; but pride and instinct alike revolted from the *rôle* itself.

"*'s ist eine hässliche Geschichte,*" had Reinhardt said. Then, as she gazed down into the Master's eyes, the sense of rebellion died. He struck a chord, still fixing her.

"Can you sing now?" he asked, under his breath.

There was a faint smile dawning about the corners of his eyes and lips. All at once she was afraid of bursting into tears.

"I don't know," she stammered. She could not imagine why she should feel so unutterably miserable.

He got up with a quietness, unwonted to that creature of leaping haste.

"After all," he said, still in that singular low voice, "we can talk a little first."

She had taken a step or two away from him as he rose, and now stood in the curve of the grand piano. He leant across to her, resting his arms upon the unlifted desk.

"What have they put into your head about Phædra over there? *Das Fräuchen!* With her there is nothing good in love, outside a little ring. *So ein Weibchen!* . . . But you — come now, have you not an artist's soul? Can you not see that love is a sacred thing in itself? *Na* — if you had been born Phædra in those older, freer days — I will say those purer days — and you had met an Hippolytus, a noble, free, clean being, say such a one as our Reinhardt yonder. . . ."

He broke off. His gaze devoured her, swept as if through every crevice of her soul. Instinctively she flung back her head, scarlet and unaccountably indignant.

"Reinhardt!" she echoed in a tone of resentment.

Lothnar's eyelids fluttered for a moment down over those intolerable eyes, a twitching passed on his face. To the girl, staring at him with she knew not what horror of apprehension in her heart, it seemed as if beard and hair were stirred as by invisible flames.

"*Sol es geht nicht also!* — Nothing there." He spoke in self-communion. "I thought as much."

He straightened himself; twisted his fingers into his beard, and stood looking at her. Slowly she felt as if

the power of thought were ebbing from her. He came round to her.

"So white," he went on, in the same manner. "How could anything so white know Phædra?"

He laid his hands on her shoulders. She did not know if he spoke the words aloud or only to the spirit: "*Sieh mich an!* And so, absolutely, Phædra wilt thou be? Yes — I will, too, that thou shouldst be Phædra. Such a young soul as thou art, yet my soul is young too. . . . eternal young! *Ach*, do we not understand each other?"

He bent and kissed her on the lips. She would have fallen at his feet, had he not caught her in his arms. She saw his face bent over hers, as through weaving mists, and it seemed to her that the fire leaped and played. She heard his voice as from a far distance. "What, still white?"

As he spoke, her heart sprang into an ecstasy of realization. He steadied her; she clung to his arm with both her hands, and buried her face in his coat sleeve.

When his hand came and turned that face gently but relentlessly to the light, the blood was singing in her ears.

"Now, that is well. Now, so burns a rose in your face, such a splendour-flower."

His grasp about her relaxed, and she stood alone. He took a slow turn in the room, and came back to her; and then round her ice-cold hands his were again clasped, gripping tight.

"Have we not understood each other? Now you are a child no longer. You are a woman and my singer. See, I will kiss you twice again; once to seal the red on

your lips that love may flower there for evermore. And once for silence."

She held him back as he bent toward her, not from any reasoned following of his words, but from a sense that there was a joy too great for her endurance. He made no effort to break down that frail barrier. His voice caressed her with an intoxicating softness that she had never heard in it till this day.

"Wilt not?"

"No," she panted, while in her heart she was clinging to him, longing to be once again within those arms and to hide her crimson cheeks against his breast.

"I will be silent," she breathed, not knowing what she said. "And I — I . . ."

His gaze mused upon her. All the power and strength of the man surrounded her, held her, played with her.

"From the first, you have ever learned quickly," he said. And then he added, still with the caress in his voice: "What is postponed is not forgotten, and we have still to sing."

To sing! Anything in the world would have been easier to her. She wanted to cry most of all — to cry and be comforted. She wanted assurances that she was not dreaming, that this unbelievable thing was true — wanted him to say again that his soul was young for her; that she was his chosen; that they understood each other. She wanted with all the innocent ardour of her trapped heart, to have those kisses of the Master that she had just refused. But through the confusion of her tangled emotions, through the pangs of a joy that

was too acute not to be pained, one thing stood forth: he had called her his Singer; and she knew that if — incomprehensible rapture! — she was to be all the rest, she was to be this to him first — his Singer.

So she sang, faltering, brokenly, with now a failing almost of sound, now, suddenly pulsing from her heart to her lips, an outburst of joy, as realization recurred like a wave.

He took her once through the score without a comment, and then shut the piano.

“For to-day, enough.”

He sat on, contemplating the brown wood.

“Shall I go?” she asked at length.

He sprang up with his old abruptness.

“Yes. And to-morrow, come again.”

There might have been twenty people in the room from the everyday manner in which he helped her on with her furs and walked to the door with her.

On the threshold, however, he paused.

“If I blow the horn twice, it will be for you, to-morrow,” he said. “For you alone.”

And, suddenly smiling, he laid his fingers on his lips, and then on hers.

She understood as if he had spoken. “Words are not needed between us,” she told herself, as she went slowly out into the leaf-strewn avenue.

Instead of going straight home, she dived into the thick recesses of the wood. It was a mellow autumn day, under a sky of that ethereal blue which holds a kind of lovely melancholy unlike spring joy or summer’s pride.

All the glade was golden with dying and drifting beech-leaves. A birch tree shone here and there, as if in its secret depth the wood were breaking into flame.

"He loves me . . . he loves me . . . "

The girl sat on the root of a tree, repeating this to herself; there was no room for another thought. But by and by she began to realize and relive again every moment of that hour which had opened upon her life with a radiance as unexpected as it was overwhelming.

Only a little while ago she had gone up that avenue trembling in uncertainty, like a schoolgirl to her secretly adored master, almost as the worshipper of old may have gone to the shrine of the God — and she had come away hence, had he not himself said it?—child no longer, but woman-souled. Oh, if it was to be woman to love so intensely that there was no death she would not give herself up to for his smile, no fire she would not leap through for his kiss, then it was true she was a woman. . . . He had wanted to kiss her again, and yet again, and she had, with a movement of shrinking, inco pre-hensible to her now, drawn back from him. "Once, that love might flower . . . " Ah, that was not needed! "Once, for silence" — that was not needed either! But the kisses, they were needed; her soul was crying out for the touch of his lips. Not that she failed to understand — "We two, we understand each other." He was too noble, too great in his strength to press where she shrank. And how could he not ask for silence? Once again she saw him stand before her, smiling, while the new mourning enveloped him.

Suddenly she remembered Frau Bertha's shrill protest. "Alone with him, and he but a month's widower!" "*So ein Weibchen!*" How little indeed such a mind would understand the sacredness of love, of love like hers and the Master's, sprung from soul to soul, like a flame!

Sarolta was awake most of that night. For the first part of it she studied the words of "Phædra" with an intensity born of the day's revelation, and took shame to herself for having misread and found ugliness in what held, after all, nothing but a great love and the sorrow of it. How would it have been with her, if she had known herself as she knew herself now — all Lothnar's — and he had known it and condemned her?

It was Phædra's treachery at the end that was the ugly part of the story, not her great love, sacred by its very greatness. But then Phædra must have been mad! Yes, Sarolta told herself, Phædra was mad, and the vengeful goddess alone was responsible for that betrayal in death. Well might Phædra have gone mad? . . . How would it be with Sarolta, were Lothnar, who had yet once loved her, to love her no more? "That would be death," said the girl aloud to the lonely silence of her little room.

According to her custom, the windows were open to the night, and the voice of the torrent roared in upon her. Leaving her score, she leaned out into the darkness. Her soul seemed to slip from the body and fly across the hidden spaces to where a tiny light ever and anon gleamed yellow between swaying tree shadows. So he, too, was watching! No wonder she could not sleep! Was he thinking of her, as she of him? Dare she linger on such a hope?

She told herself that she would never be unreasonable, that she would understand, as no woman on earth would understand, exactly her place in his life; his singer, part of his work. Yet for that very reason more of a helpmate than any other woman could ever be. "The voice of his inspiration," he had called Reinhardt. To be that to Lothnar, only more intimately, as wife is closer than friend — what a vision it was that spread before her, palpitating with a glory so dazzling that she could scarce look upon it!

Much to Frau Bertha's scandal the next morning Sarolta explained that the two blasts of the horn, which resounded toward the eleventh hour, were for herself and not for Reinhardt. The little woman flung up both hands as the wooden house shook to the slamming of its outer door on the girl's hurried exit.

"I tell thee, Friedel," she cried, "that is becoming a bold thing."

The tenor looked at her with his large indulgence.

"Nay, my heart, it is the artist's ways that are foreign to your nature."

"To such ways," said the wife fiercely, "I will never accustom myself. Do not ask it of me."

"I do not ask it of thee," he said, and kissed her forehead between the curling pins which still restrained her two front locks.

Frau Bertha need not have entertained any apprehensions as to the propriety of her guest's visit to the Alt-schloss this day.

From the threshold of the music-room Sarolta saw

Webel at the piano. She halted involuntarily with a sinking of her heart. She had come to Lothnar, running the length of the road and avenue, with no thought but that she was the loved one coming to the beloved, troth plighted by yesterday's hour — unimaginable hour!

She entered the room slowly, as if all her ardour and joy had been turned to a leaden dullness. Was it possible that he had not desired to see her alone, were it but for one moment — for the space of one of those kisses to set her soul singing for all the long day to follow? How were her lips to sing if her soul did not? Then she felt his eye upon her, and the scarlet rushed into her face. It seemed to her as if by that glance he had caught her to him. With it light broke upon her perplexity.

How foolish her doubts! Had he not to think of her, of her good name as well as of his own, since the world must not know of their understanding across a fresh-made grave?

But all he said to her was the old reproach:

"You have come too quickly . . . you are panting. We will wait. Webel, just run through this passage for me. I have thought of a change of measure here."

Under Webel's fingers the stormy accompaniment to Phædra's first song broke into the room, much, thought Sarolta, as the noise of the torrent would break into the wooden house on the opening of her window. She began to lose herself in the pulsing interest which the next ten minutes held. Between the composer and his interpreter she could hear a masterpiece in the making: Lothnar's very brain at work!

He called her up at last; and she sang. He stood at the back of her all the while, yet never had she felt his presence more intensely.

"Well, what do you think of it, *Alter*," came his voice in the pause that succeeded the last falling note.

"It goes," said the imperturbable conductor.

"It goes better," amended Lothnar; "to-morrow it will go better still."

On that she was dismissed.

In spite of philosophy and common-sense, in spite of the satisfaction of his approval, she went home in a turmoil of misery. Between to-day and yesterday — what a gulf! He had not even touched her hand. She went straight up into her own room and flung herself on the bed; but she could not cry. There seemed to be an angry fire within her that scorched all tenderness.

Presently the reaction came; once again she chided herself for the folly, for the want of trust . . . she was showing herself unworthy of him! She called back every word he had spoken the day before, and balm crept into her soul. And was there not to-morrow?

But, on the morrow, when she drew near the music-room, there came a kind of faintness upon her. Well could Phædra's languid moan befit her present mood! As she stood, lacking the power to knock, the door was flung open, and Lothnar stood before her. With one glance she saw that the room was empty; her heart gave a great leap.

He took both her hands and drew her in, shut the door

behind her with his shoulder, and remained looking at her, still holding her hands. His luminous extraordinary eyes went over her, and again she had that sensation as if the look was an actual caress.

"*Immer so blass!*" he said. His voice once again had the low note that bewitched her ear. "Still so pale!"

And as she hung on his gaze, feeling as if it held her soul, he went on, after that manner of his, speaking more to himself than to her:

"*Macht nichts — macht nichts.* Between this whiteness and that there lies the red. Fire and fire and glow between: Iphigenia's and Phædra's, both white, though never the same. Understand that, thou little one: over the red there is no leaping back."

He released her hands; then, from a basket of flowers on the table, with much deliberation, he separated a crimson carnation and gave it to her.

"Fools will beflower me," he said, smiling. "But to-day there is some use in it. Place the red of it there in thy breast. So. And, with thy little white face above it, thou wilt be to-day such a Phædra as has sprung out of my heart."

He rang the bell and Webel came in.

When she had sung Lothnar did not speak; but he looked at Webel, and that sapient man of music nodded his bearded head.

"To-morrow," said the Master then, "we can have our Hippolytus back."

"With permission," insinuated Webel, "since next Thursday the theatre reopens with 'Prometheus'——"

"*Tscha!* 'Prometheus'!" interrupted the Master impatiently.

Webel made no reply but adjusted his spectacles and turned his round gaze back to the score.

Lothnar stood, a frown of vexation on his countenance. Sarolta could feel in her own soul the frenzy of his impatience to go on with the work in hand. With unexpected reasonableness, however, he suddenly gave in:

"*Hast recht* — 'Prometheus' is after all, also son of mine. But forget not — ah, let none of you forget!" his inspired gaze lightened — "that 'Hippolytus' is my beloved! Of all my children 'Hippolytus' is my darling!" Then he laughed, "No favourites with that one" he said, jerking his thumb toward the quiet, ponderous figure. "Oh, thou old automaton! Well, Saturday be it then. Phædra and Hippolytus together here. Understood?"

He broke into laughter, incomprehensible to the girl, rubbed his hands together, and then ran them through his beard.

"It goes — it goes!" he cried, with the glee of a child.

That laughter haunted Sarolta. She hardly knew if it was happiness or misery that she carried away with her to-day. He had said once more wonderful and unforgettable things; he had made her feel more than ever that she was his, that she was even as he wished her to be — "such a Phædra as has sprung from my heart!" Could Lothnar's lips utter words of deeper content in

her? And the flower! Every breath of its deep fragrance was sweet as a kiss. Yet he had not kissed her! Yet he had dismissed her till Saturday, without a hint of regret — and this was Tuesday!

Suddenly she felt horribly alone. There was no one to whom she could speak, to whom tell her fantastic story, by whom be envied and congratulated, be scolded and reassured! If Sady were only by her side!

Upon this impulse she opened her desk and began feverishly to write. But, even as pen touched paper, an indescribable repugnance to set forth her secret came upon her. It was not only the memory of how he had trusted her to silence, it was an unreasoned instinct in herself. So she wrote barely three lines:

Sady, I don't know if I am the happiest or most unhappy of creatures!

Your

SABOLTA.

When the letter was posted she told herself that Sady would think her mad.

CHAPTER XVII

"I HEARD the winding of the horn for you this morning," said Sarolta, abruptly greeting the tenor, when they met at the midday-meal the next day.

"Yes, Fräulein Sarolta. I went, and, as I was telling the wife, I bring back news. The Master has gone — to Berlin!"

Sarolta bent her head over the sorrel and parsley soup to hide her face. She knew she must be pale because she felt so cold. Gone, without a word!

"*Ach, ja.* The Kaiser has summoned him." Friedhelin paused impressively. Then he plunged at his soup again. "Yes, it is so; all honours come together. And now, little wife, I will continue. It seems His Majesty has a wish that 'Iphigenia' should be given in Berlin early in the year, for the royal visits."

"*Ach, Friedel!*" Frau Bertha exclaimed. This was indeed news; the colour deepened on her plump cheeks.

"Yes, Bertha," said her husband, genially answering the wistful glance: "Thou shalt accompany us. Who should be there if not thou? A box shalt thou have, to invite thy relations into. And pretty thou shalt make thyself. An occasion for new frocks, if ever there was one! What? *Leberwurst* to-day! *Prachtvoll!*"

He paused to help himself from the savoury dish — your master of the house is served first in Germany.

"And so Dr. Lothnar is gone?"

Sarolta's voice sounded strange to her own ears, and she felt her hostess's eyes bent upon her with that unfriendly scrutiny which had come into them of late. Friedhelm began to laugh.

"I found him — just think — ready to indite a telegram of refusal! *Ach*, you should have seen him! 'I,' he growled, 'to come at their beck and call! . . . I, to offer them another of my soul's children to stone!' My blood ran cold, I assure thee, *Herzchen*. I saw him on the point of committing the mistake of his life. 'Well,' I said, 'refuse — refuse if you will. The Berliners will say you're afraid.' 'Afraid, I?'" Again laughter shook the giant at the reminiscence. "The very hair on his head rose — he faced me like a lion incensed. Then of a sudden he cried: 'I will go! I will tell the Emperor: "Iphigenia" I will not give in Berlin, but if you want work of mine, "Hippolytus" you shall have. "Hippolytus!"' he roared at me — "'Hippolytus," that was hissed and mocked and damned — ten years ago. He can take it or leave it, but — but —!' there came into his eyes that light — you know, *fräulein*." Instinctively, the artist had turned to the fellow-artist. "'Take it he will,' he said then; 'I will triumph where I was rejected.' And so to Berlin he has gone; and those two great ones will meet to-morrow!"

Frau Bertha's under lip trembled like that of a disappointed child.

"Such an attitude to the Emperor! His Majesty will

never tolerate such independence. *Ach was!* It will come to nothing but shame for him, and that will be the end of it."

"The shame will not be for Dr. Lothnar!" cried Sarolta, and drew upon herself again the gaze of reprobation, doubt and dislike.

"Do not excite yourself, *fräulein*," said the lady, in tones which reminded the girl of Frau Hegemann.

The peace-loving tenor interrupted:

"My beloved, that *Leberwurst* — it had a thought too much pepper."

"*Ach*, Friedel — is it possible — too much! Rosa, perhaps, while my back was turned ——"

"Nevertheless, I will have some more."

"Will Dr. Lothnar be back for the 'Prometheus'?" asked Sarolta after a long silence.

"Not probable, *fräulein*, unless he fails to arrange things in Berlin — and that's not likely, my Bertha, I assure you; he will have many preparations to make. Our Webel will conduct on Thursday. The wife and you must have good seats — I will see to that."

The Thursday of the "Prometheus" was a day of storm and wind, and Reinhardt returned from a long morning at the theatre, wet through. He was in high spirits, scoffed at his wife's remonstrance, ate an enormous meal to last him till his late supper, and fell heavily asleep in his armchair over a cigar.

"Friedhelm is flushed," said Frau Bertha to Sarolta.

The two sat together in the overheated *salon*; the

rain was streaming against the panes, and even the air-loving Sarolta could not venture out. She had promised, moreover, to help her hostess with the mending of Prometheus's tunic, which was unexpectedly discovered to be torn.

"What weather!" proceeded the wife. "What a career! And my Friedhelm excites himself so much over his work."

A long snore penetrated through the half-opened door of the dining-room. For the fourth time Frau Reinhardt left her sewing to creep across the painted boards and look in upon her sleeping lord.

"He is certainly flushed" — she repeated when she returned.

"How she fusses!" thought Sarolta wearily. "How could an artist hamper himself with such a wife?" Her own thoughts were far away, wondering how it went with him yonder in Berlin — and if he thought of her; wondering why he had not sent her a line, a word. Was she so little to him, after all? Was he so much afraid of gossip? She remembered Friedhelm's mimicry: 'I — afraid?' remembered that Lothnar had gone to oppose the most powerful will in the land. No, it was not that. What then? He had faith in her faith. . . . "We understand each other," he had said. Yes, that was it. She must never let him guess these doubts, this weakness.

Suddenly she found that her companion was waiting for an answer to some question.

"I beg your pardon," she stammered, dazedly looking up from her mechanical stitching.

"*Aber*, Fräulein Sarolta," cried the other acidly, "any one so absent-minded these last days I have never seen. I cannot conceive what has come over you!" The mollifying influence of Sarolta's usefulness gave way before a return of sharp suspicion. "Three times I have asked your opinion. Have you noticed which my Friedhelm seems to prefer as a *bei-essen* — the raw ham or the apple and herring salad? I have prepared a Hamburg steak for his supper, and to that I must have a *Schmeck Stück*. My Friedel returns ever so tired and so hungry!"

But though there was herring salad and Hamburg steak for supper that night, Prometheus was unable to do justice to either. He was heavy and unlike himself, thought Sarolta, though unalterably good-tempered. Finally, in answer to his wife's questions, delivered with almost irate anxiety, he confessed that he had a headache.

"Thou didst catch a chill this morning. . . . I knew it!" she cried tragically. "Thou wast naturally perspiring at rehearsal, and didst come forth into the wet. *Ach*, did I not bid thee take thy rain-coat?"

"It was not raining when I left. It was not that. But to-night, nay, it is true, on the stage I was cold. They left some windows open — and thou knowest it is a heavy part."

Frau Bertha, in what Sarolta could not help thinking irritating and disproportionate solicitude, urged a cold packing, at which Friedhelm shivered; then a steam bath, upon which he vowed he was burning hot, and in proof

of it extended his hand. The wife had a fresh explosion as she felt it. She seemed unaccountably angry, Sarolta thought.

"Fever — thou hast fever!" she exclaimed accusingly.

He laughed at her, heartily enough to disarm such suspicions.

"I only want bed, my little wife."

He consented, however, to camomile tea.

In the dawn Sarolta was awakened by her hostess's appearance at her bedside.

"Fräulein Sarolta, rouse yourself, for God's sake!" Through webs of tangled dreams the girl stared, not sure if this were not also a dream. "My Friedhelm is so ill — oh, so ill! I must have the doctor. Yet I cannot leave him. I do not know which way to turn — Rosa is so stupid."

Sarolta sat up. This was no dream. The plump, bustling, self-satisfied Bertha was trembling, and seemed quite unaware of the tears that were coursing down her cheeks.

"I will go," cried the girl promptly. "Don't be frightened — of course it's only influenza."

"*Ach*, he is so ill!" moaned Bertha. It was the poor woman's very composure as she explained the address and the shortest road to the doctor that most impressed upon her listener the urgency of the moment. But, as soon as she felt herself understood, she broke down again.

"*Ach*, if we had not been exiled here!" she sobbed. "No telephone . . . such a distance! . . . If I lose my Friedel —"

She rushed away upon these words.

"If I lose my Friedel!" The thought pursued Sarolta as she dressed with a haste that almost defeated its own end. Surely it was not possible that such a catastrophe could threaten! Only yesterday he had entered upon them in splendour of health; had laughed and eaten and slept with all his Viking zest. It was nonsense, of course — only Frau Bertha's inborn fussiness.

Yet as Sarolta ran down the creaking wooden stairs and out into the misty garden, where daylight was still but a lividness on the face of night, a sense of immense tragedy had already taken possession of her soul.

Although every medical authority of note in Frankheim assembled in the wooden house by degrees that day, to fight for Friedhelm Reinhardt's life, from the very beginning it was a losing battle.

To mind the little Ulrich in the attic nursery, while a distracted Rosa ran between kitchen and sick-room, was all that Sarolta could do. With the artist's horror of pain and painful emotions, she was glad enough not to be wanted below. She sat the long hours through, listening to the hurried feet that went in and out, to and fro, on stairs and passages; to the sound of the motors that crunched upon the road. And ever and anon the cry of a voice, dreadfully hoarse, would reach her and set her shuddering. The tenor was delirious, and now would sing, in unrecognizable notes, some stave that had flowed in such golden purity from his lips only a few hours ago; now, declaring that the horn was calling him, would strive

to rise from his bed in such fever strength that it was as much as Webel and the doctors could do to hold him down.

The little Ulrich, not yet two years old, was a heavy, healthy child, to whom Sarolta had never felt herself in the least drawn. His contented stolidity, however, made her task very easy. He would sit on her lap or play with his toys, as she wished. She had nothing to distract her mind from its anxiety. And all the while her heart was sick within her. She had not realized before how much Friedhelm, great artist and simple, kindly hearted man, had become endeared to her! Never had she had from him anything but pleasant looks and words and helpful deeds. It came upon her now that life without his genial presence would be a cold place; yes, even to her who carried such fire in her heart.

"He would always have been my friend," she told herself forlornly, "always . . . whatever happened—" and then caught herself up on that last thought with a stab of pain. What could happen? Even if she lost her friend, was she not safe—she that had such a lover, such a betrothed?

And all through the long day she kept listening for one step on the stairs. Not a motor, not a droschke drew up to the garden gate that did not bring her to the window with a leaping hope. . . . Of course they had sent for him! Surely he would soon be here! And into her own selfish longing there grew a new terror—Friedhelm would die unless Lothnar were here soon! Unreasoned as the thought was, it obsessed her; she was certain of it—the presence of Lothnar alone could save his friend.

Lothnar's strength only would have the power to wrest him from Death.

When Ulrichchen had docilely taken his supper and as docilely laid himself to sleep in the little white cot, Sarolta crept down the stairs. The house had grown very still; the carriage and the two cars had gone away, and she knew that Webel also had left, for she had heard his voice in the garden. She was driven by the desire to ask when the Master might be expected; but she did not dare knock at that closed door, and so she sat on the lowest step of the staircase waiting. She wished that it were not all so silent; she could hear the distant voice of the torrent — so silent it was! Presently a bell rang shrilly from the sick-room, and with unusual promptitude Rosa pounded up the stairs, carrying a large block of ice in a basin. Frau Bertha came out as the heavy footsteps reached the landing. Impulsively Sarolta sprang forward; but the question died half-spoken on her lips as the other turned her face toward her. It was swollen and glazed with tears beyond recognition. But Frau Bertha was not crying now; she looked at Sarolta with a dreadful blank stare, snatched the ice from Rosa, and went back into the room.

Before the door was closed again, Sarolta caught a glimpse of the doctor she had herself fetched that morning; he was sitting at the foot of the bed, with his hands folded.

Heavily she went back to the attic, carrying the omen of that motionless figure in her heart: he was sitting with his hands folded — he could do no more. And Reinhardt lay so still.

She made no attempt to go to bed, but sat in the nursery armchair, feeding the stove from time to time, that its company might not fail her.

About midnight there was once again a stir echoing through the wooden house. It was no advent from without — the commotion came from within. Once she heard the doctor's voice crying an order on the landing. The running of feet and the opening and closing of doors went on for a little while, and then the silence fell again. Then, just as Sarolta's palpitating heart was settling into some kind of quietness, Rosa's tired slouching tread resounded on the creaking stairs, stumbling with haste.

"Fräulein, fräulein!" she gasped, bursting into the nursery, "the herr is dying, and the mistress says" — she struggled for breath — "the mistress says you are to bring the little one — at once — at once!"

Sarolta heard the girl sob aloud, as she tramped down the stairs again.

At once! At once! There was no time for her to pause upon the terror and the sorrow of it; to listen to the shrinking coward instinct that would bid her fly and hide. She caught the sleeping child from his bed, wrapped him in the eiderdown, and, staggering under his weight, carried him out of the room. As the light of the landing struck upon his face, he opened his eyes and pulled a lip of distress; but he was a good child, and the cry was no more than a whimper. It brought Frau Bertha out upon them instantly. Much as she had snatched the basin from Rosa's hand she now snatched

her child. Not knowing what else to do, Sarolta followed her into the room.

She need not have dreaded the sight of the sick man. Reinhardt lay all his great length in a wonderful placidity. His bearded head was low on the pillows, and in the shaded light there seemed little change about his grand features. Only one hand outstretched upon the coverlet was touched with the lamp rays, and Sarolta saw that it was already the colour of death, and that it was never a moment still, but plucked and plucked as if at invisible blades of grass. And the doctor sat where he had sat before — with his hands folded.

She stood just inside the door; she heard the child's whimper, louder raised, and Reinhardt's voice — his own voice once more, only very far away.

"The poor little one! . . . Lay him close that I may kiss him, Bertha."

Frau Bertha moved in a tense silence.

"Is that Sarolta?" — the far-away voice spoke again.

Sarolta came to the bedside; but he did not seem to know that she was close to him, and spoke straight before him.

"*Ach, Sarolta, wie schæn haben wir zusammen gesungen* — I shall never sing Hippolytus now."

The wife turned with a fierce movement from the farther bed in which she had just laid the child. She fell on her knees, and caught the plucking hand.

"*Ach, Friedhelm, Friedhelm* . . . hast thou nothing to say to me — to me, thy wife?"

With all his failing senses he tried to respond to that

cry. The light of the deep, undeviating love of his whole manhood shone upon his face. He made an effort to turn in the bed toward her.

"Mein armes, gutes Weibchen!"

The words were more breathed than spoken, and then that very breath seemed to stop. Sarolta caught her own to listen; she saw the doctor half rise from his chair, and then fall back with a single gesture of helplessness.

A low moan from Frau Bertha intensified the awful waiting. Then, all at once, the giant figure raised itself sitting in the bed. Staring with widely opened eyes at that point of the room where Sarolta had first stood when she entered, the dying man flung out his hand toward it.

"Sarolta," he cried in a loud, warning voice, "*hüte Dich*. . . . have a care!"

The doctor sprang forward, but it was Frau Bertha who caught her husband in her arms as he fell back. But even as she did so, she flung one look at Sarolta — a look of hatred. It was across a dead man.

"God's will!" said the doctor. His voice broke; he had been Friedhelm's close friend.

Sarolta fell on her knees, and hid her face against the chair nearest to her. She had seen death before; but not like this. The good Uncle Mosenthal had slipped away as a child may fall into sleep, and none could have told the moment of the passage. But to die with words of delirium on his lips, in that sudden leap of strength — it seemed unnatural, cruel, terrible, like a death by violence! Her soul was filled with a sick terror: why

should he have called to her? and why had Frau Bertha that look in her eyes?

She knew of no sin in her own heart, and yet had a sense of guilt. She could not reason; she could not pray — scarcely think; only a black dread was upon her. She heard Frau Bertha's voice, quite calm:

"Bitte, lieber Freund, it is only my hand that must touch him. I will close his eyes."

Sarolta shuddered. Reinhardt's eyes that had always looked so joyously and kindly upon life!

Steps upon the stairs without! — Steps and a voice she knew.

"The Master is here!" said Webel, entering; a thrill of hopeful excitement in his usually level tones.

"It is too late!"

Sarolta never knew if any one had really said the words aloud, or if it were only the utterance of her own grief; but she knew that the conductor's voice trailed off with a groan, and that, as he stood blocking the doorway, some one thrust him aside.

Then, while the great silence of Death held them all, Lothnar's presence filled the room.

The girl had no thought now but for him. She saw him stand, his rough travel cloak flung open, his rugged face set as if granite-hewn; only his eyes moved from Reinhardt's still face to the faces of those about the bed — the widow's, the doctor's, her own. In spirit she flung out her arms to him with an impulse of tenderness that had never yet come over her love; but his glance swept over her as if he knew her not and fixed itself again

on the dead man. Then he brushed his forehead as one who would sweep away a foolish dream. He took a step forward:

"Friedel!"

The name fell with infinite gentleness. Frau Bertha suddenly sobbed.

"*Ach, verehrter Freund . . .*" began the doctor hoarsely. But both fell silent. Lothnar was blind and deaf to all but one thing.

"Friedel," he called again, this time with a voice that shook the room. It had an awful ring of anger in its pain. The child woke and cried loudly; and Frau Bertha caught it up, her loosened tears falling like rain.

Lothnar took one of those livid hands that still lay as the last gesture had outflung them. Held by the horrible spell, the others saw him clutch and press. A moment he stood as if unable to believe that no answering pressure was to come. Then his frenzied fingers closed round the dead man's wrist.

"What is this?" His voice was so hoarse that it sounded like something torn.

Frau Bertha, hushing the child against her breast, answered:

"He is dead; leave him in peace!"

"Dead! That is a lie — idiots and fools you all are! Dead? You don't understand. How can he be dead? Friedel, thou art not dead ——"

Lothnar dragged down the bedclothes that lay across the tenor's mighty chest; then have a loud and dreadful cry of laughing triumph: "He is warm, I tell you. No,

no, friend of mine, thy heart could not turn cold so easily. What are you all about? You, doctor — you, wife — bring me brandy; I will make him drink. See, I lift him up in my arms. He is smiling. Did I not tell you so — Friedel . . . my own breath I will pour into thy lungs. Cannot a sick man faint? . . . Brandy, you fools!”

The torn voice rose and fell in agonized cadence. Even while with one hand Lothnar passionately gestured for the restorative, with the other he clasped the inert weight against his breast. Then his head was bent, seeking the lips silent for evermore.

With an ejaculation: “This must not be!” Dr. Baumann rushed forward. But Webel arrested him:

“*Austoben lassen!* Let him storm himself out . . . !” said he. He was quite unconscious of the tears that were rolling down into his beard.

No sooner had his mouth touched that of the dead man than Lothnar relinquished his grasp and fell on his knees as if stricken; his face pressed into the bedclothes, his hands clasped above his head.

Frau Bertha had checked her sobs. She laid her child back upon her bed and with deliberate movements rearranged her husband’s head on the pillow, smoothed the disordered clothes about him, folded the stiffening arms; next she drew the sheet over his face. Upon that face an unearthly serenity was settling ever more deeply — majestic rebuke of eternity to the futile human passion that raged about its rest.

She remained a moment wrapped in a fierce composure,

looking down at the convulsed figure on the other side of the bed.

"Take shame, Herr Lothnar," she said suddenly, with anger, "to disturb the peace of the dead!" The tears rushed back upon her: "Do I not lose my all?" she sobbed, "yet do you see me rail against the will of the Almighty?"

Every conventional instinct, every inherited tradition of the God-fearing simple burgher class from which she had sprung, had risen outraged within her, and rang in her voice.

Lothnar arose from his kneeling posture and stood glaring at her wordless. Then his gaze fell upon the sheeted outline. He staggered and the doctor caught him by the elbow. But, like some wounded wild beast, the touch stung him into strength of fury again.

"*Los!*" he thundered; steadied himself and breathed heavily through his nostrils. A torrent of words broke from him. It was Friedhelm's widow he denounced, and, behind her, Fate that had blundered:

"Your all! — you smug little kitchen wife! What do you know of it? What was he to you? A man to cook for, to cosset and plague and give squalling children to! Any one else, any coxcomb of a lieutenant, would have served you as well . . . will serve you as well — miserable creature who could not even keep life in his splendid frame! Impotent fools that you are! Had I been here, do you think I would have let him go. . . . You are resigned to the will of the Almighty! It comes easy to you! I — I — I!" — he .

struck forehead and breast alternately with frantic gesture, "I will have none of the God who mars his own handiwork. What am I without him? He is mine; he is necessary to me. My friend, the brother of my soul — more than that, the instrument of my art! *Er ist mir nötig, versteht ihr mich alle?*"

His eyes with their mad fire ran once more from face to face, to fall back on the shrouded figure. "I cannot get on without him. He is my Hippolytus!" His voice rang piteously of a sudden. "It is not true," he cried, and seemed like a man breaking from a trance or a delirium. "Did any one say that Hippolytus was dead!" He plucked at the sheet with an uncertain touch, and, as if the strength to lift it had failed him, fell against the bed and from that to the floor.

"This is best," said the doctor, wiping his forehead.

Sarolta, trembling in every limb, stood now holding on to the chair, as Webel and the doctor carried the unconscious man out of the room. What seemed a long while passed in the awful silence left behind. All at once, Frau Bertha turned like a tigress: "If you please, *fräulein*, you will leave me alone with my dead." The girl started from her miserable trance and mechanically held out her arms for the child.

"*Ach, nein!*" cried the other. "I keep my little one. Am I to have nothing left to me?"

To the sound of the widow's loud sobbing Sarolta dragged herself from the room which had held such unimaginable calamity that night. By the open door of her own attic she remained listening, breathless; ever and

anon creeping to the head of the little stairs to hearken for what sounds could reach her from below. Once she told herself desperately that she must go to him: he had fallen as helpless as the dead man; what if he too were dying! But an invincible physical reluctance held her. Then suddenly she heard his voice in the hall — harsh, impatient:

“Come then, Webel ——”

The outer door was closed very softly by some one from within and a slow step came up the stairs. It was the doctor returning to the death-chamber.

She went back and flung herself exhaustedly, dressed as she was, on her bed. But it was not to sleep.

Beneath and beyond the anguish and grief and terror lay a pain sharper than all the rest — a question piercing and not to be answered. Lothnar had looked upon her, and had not seen her! What was she, then, to him?

CHAPTER XVIII

"UNBELIEVABLE catastrophe, I am heartbroken," telegraphed Madame Costanza to the widow.

Telegrams and wreaths of every description, messages of regret and sympathy from all quarters of the musical world, poured into the little wooden house. Almost the whole of Frankheim, rich and poor, drove or tramped out of the Ost Thor to the garden gate, with a tribute that ranged from the many-streamered gold laurel wreath to the bunch of wild autumn flowers tied with a black string.

The funeral itself was a pageant such as Frankheim had rarely seen. The opera chorus sang a hymn round the open grave under the beating finger of Webel. Not a *Musik Verein* in the land but had sent its deputy. Yet the great artist was not so much regretted as the good fellow. It seemed that he had been an unobtrusive but generous helper of struggling comrades, and kindly anecdotes about him flew from lip to lip. Many shops were closed for the day; so was the theatre, indefinitely.

"If it had been for a royal personage, it could not have passed off differently," said the widow, proudly lifting her *crêpe*-veiled head and looking round through swollen eyelids at the group of sympathetic female friends who had flocked to her house after the ceremony. "The Grand-

Duke was represented, and even the Dowager Grand-Duchess — *Ach*, she sent a wreath of *immortelles!*”

“We saw it, best Bertha, we saw it!” cried the friends in chorus. “Black and yellow *immortelles*, *reizend!*”

“And that of the Berlin Conservatorium — *ach*, that was beyond words lovely — *allerliebste!*”

Wreath after wreath was re-enumerated with much ejaculation and clacking of tongues, and Frau Reinhardt felt great comfort steal upon her soul.

Presently the heads drew closer together. One, only one, had been conspicuous by his absence. The Herr Doktor Lothnar had not stirred outside the Altschloss since the night of his friend’s death. None had seen him but Webel and his servant. The Archduke had sent his physician, who had been refused admittance. It was rumoured that Webel was in deep anxiety.

A lady tapped her forehead significantly; another, not to be outdone, vowed that she knew, on the best authority — her Anna-Lise was a niece of Dr. Lothnar’s own cook — that the composer had not swallowed bit or sup since —

The widow had drawn herself up and compressed her lips at the first mention of Lothnar’s name. A deep grudge she bore him now. Was it not his opera that had killed her Friedhelm? Ah, and was not the deathbed scene an unforgettable outrage? Yet that through grief for the loss of her husband the world-renowned composer should lose his wits was a tribute more startling than any other to the dead man’s memory. So, though she darkened with dislike, she swelled with pride.

While friends thus administered comfort to the

bereaved, Sarolta sat miserably alone in the little room where she had been so tremblingly joyful.

Frau Bertha had scarcely spoken to her since their parting on the night of death; but, whenever they had met, the widow had shot dreadful glances at her — glances charged with hatred, with accusation, and scorn.

“What have I done?” thought Sarolta, wearily. Not that she cared very greatly; this was a minor trouble indeed, compared with the tide that swept her soul. Grief for Friedhelm, anxiety for her own future, her dismal isolation in this stricken house, everything was swamped in the bitter waters of her own misery. The longing for the smallest sign from Lothnar, combined with a growing apprehension, possessed her utterly.

—“Have a care, Sarolta!” What had Friedhelm meant by his warning? In the pain and horror of the moment, she had failed to grasp its ominous significance. Now the words recurred again and again with terrifying insistence. What if it had been no delirium, but a vision in death of some peril which threatened her? What peril? She only knew of one that could affect her — the loss of Lothnar’s love. She could not contemplate that.

When the early twilight of this funeral day began to fall, Frau Hegemann, who had a bat-like fondness for the darker hours, made her appearance at the wooden house; and, Frau Bertha’s other company having departed to their own hearths, she remained on in long conclave with the widow.

The inner folds of the human heart shelter singular

impulses; to none of her honest intimates did the mourner give her confidence; it was to this harsh and gloomy soul that she chose to lay bare the hidden wound; perhaps because she had always felt that Frau Hegemann hated Sarolta.

"He called her thou . . . with his last breath — he called her thou!"

"No man can be trusted with a wanton," said Frau Hegemann, bitingly.

The widow broke into wrath. Her Friedhelm had never been of such. God forgive her if she had suspected him! Yet, what could his warning have meant? What was it that she — his own true wife, had ignored?

"Seek not to know," advised the hag. "Have I not learned the ways of artists?"

The other gave way to tortured sobbing.

"My Friedhelm! my Friedhelm!"

"*Ach*, in Heaven's name, blame him not . . . the girl being what she is! Did I not see from the first moment in Paris? — How could you think she would spare your husband, when Dr. Lothnar himself has not escaped her?"

In some inexplicable way Frau Bertha found a kind of consolation in the thought. It was true the creature had had the boldness, the unheard-of effrontery, to go alone day after day to the Altschloss, in spite of all one could say to her — "and him not six weeks bereaved."

The two women caught at each other, each in her new mourning. Then, trembling from head to foot, the widow cried she would as soon keep a snake in the house.

"I will take her back," said Frau Hegemann grimly.
"This very night."

Sarolta lifted a flushed face from her pillow and stared at the gaunt black figure that stood at the foot of her bed like some cruel image of fate.

"Rise, Fräulein Vaneck, and pack."

The girl gazed uncomprehendingly.

"It is impossible that you should remain here," proceeded the rasping voice.

Sarolta sat up, her heart beating to suffocation.

"Why — who says so?" she stammered. Was this Lothnar's order? And what could it portend?

"That is a question, fräulein, which you must answer for yourself. Frau Reinhardt declines to keep you — that should be enough. I am waiting to take you back to my house this night."

"To-night?"

"Yes, to-night. Your packing need not detain you for any undue length of time, I should imagine."

With this sneer at the girl's modest wardrobe, Frau Hegemann withdrew.

It was next day that rumour ran like wildfire through Frankheim with an extraordinary tale.

An early visitor had brought a wreath to Reinhardt's resting-place in the little church-yard outside the town. He had found that the flowers left in a monstrous mound above the new-made grave had been thrust right and left, and that, upon the earth thus laid bare, a fire had

been kindled, which had burnt itself out. Upon close inspection, he had discovered some fragments of charred, but unconsumed, manuscript and print — obviously of music, obviously, also, operatic. The young man — an artist who had arrived in Frankheim too late for the obsequies — hurried importantly to Webel carrying the torn, half-burned pages with him.

For once the conductor was moved out of his phlegm.

"Ach, Gott, du Allmächtiger!" he cried, casting from his eyes the spectacles through which he had been peering, "The score of 'Hippolytus'!"

There was little hair to tear upon that bald and close-cropped head; but he tore at it.

"Calamity! Calamity!" he groaned; and, forgetting his spectacles on the floor, dashed from the room, leaving his visitor open-mouthed, unable as yet to realize the full significance of his own tidings.

Webel, who had scarcely slackened speed on the way, halted now on the threshold of the music-room, trying to pierce the darkness that reigned within. Every shutter was drawn against the lovely October sunshine. Lothnar had endured no light about him since that black night in the wooden house. It seemed, Webel thought, when outlines began dimly to shape themselves, as if the Master had not moved from the armchair in which he had left him the previous evening, sunk in an apathy from which no effort could rouse him.

A faint, hoarse laugh sounded; upon this sign of life,

the conductor, striving for his wonted composure, closed the door behind him.

But after all he could not achieve composure. The greatness of the catastrophe he apprehended had shaken him too completely.

"Master, it is not true?"

"Of what babblest thou?"

"There has been one to the grave who has found — *ach, mein Freund* — has found our 'Hippolytus'!"

"Our Hippolytus is dead — did you not know that?"

Webel wiped his wet forehead, took a blundering step in the gloom, and fell on his knees beside the armchair.

"*Verehrtester* — most revered . . ." he began, and choked. Without rising, Lothnar jerked the chair fiercely backward.

"Webel, I hate thee ——"

"Why so, dear Master?" said the poor conductor, kneeling humbly on. 'Excellent, self-reliant, sensible Teuton as he was, he was at his wits' end.

"Because thou art not Friedhelm," pursued Lothnar. His voice had dropped to a sort of mocking sing-song. "Because it was not you who died and left me my Hippolytus. Any one of you I could have spared, but not him. *Er war mir nötig* — he was necessary to me. Yes — I went to the grave in the dawn, and there they lie all together, Prometheus, Achilles, Hippolytus—all my strong sons, in one grave. Put up a stone, and write on it, 'Here lies the soul of Lothnar' . . ."

Webel got heavily to his feet. In his extremity calmness returned to him:

"This is madness, Herr Doktor," he said severely.

Again that uncanny laugh shook the occupant of the armchair.

"Did you think — did you ever think I was sane, O thou Webel?" Then the low, half-chanting utterance was broken by a savage cry: "Begone!"

Webel closed the door softly behind him and again wiped his forehead.

"Madness," he said aloud, "perhaps death! . . . No help! Yet help must be found."

He struck his forehead as if to strike out thought. "'He was necessary to me!' Bah — What says the proverb? There is no necessary man." To find another Reinhardt was impossible; but to find one who could fill his part, and fill it well — that was surely within the range of things that might be done. It must be done.

As the conductor stood reflecting, Mark, the servant, came slow-footed up the stairs, gazing at a telegraphic dispatch which he held in his hands.

"Give!" said Webel unhesitatingly.

He opened the telegram and read, holding the sheet almost touching his eyes in the absence of his spectacles: "His Majesty graciously expects Herr Doktor Lothnar to reconsider his decision concerning the production of 'Iphigenia' in Berlin next April."

"*Ach, Gott!*" cried Webel again. With a gesture of despair he handed back the telegram to the servant, who read it stolidly, and nodded.

"Yes, we telegraphed we would be unable to give any representation in Berlin," he commented.

"There is no time to be lost," said Webel with a groan, and hurled himself down the stairs.

Mark looked after him and shook his head.

"Even the Herr Direktor — gone distraught!"

CHAPTER XIX

GLOOM pervaded the atmosphere of the town. It was not so much because of the loss of their distinguished and popular fellow townsman as of the terrible consequences which seemed to threaten. Lothnar, their great one, was mad, some said; was ill to death, others assured. With the dimming of its star, the glory of Frankheim faded. The theatre was closed, everything was at a stand-still, blighted in full prosperity. Then two simultaneous occurrences brought consternation to its climax: one was a notice from the Berlin official *Gazette*, regretting to inform its readers that, owing to Dr. Lothnar's ill health, all prospects of the visit of the Frankheim Opera Company had had to be abandoned.

"We presume," the correspondent proceeded to remark, "that the distinguished composer must be very ill indeed, otherwise we cannot conceive that he would allow anything to interfere with the so graciously expressed wish of His Majesty, whose condescension, we understand, even went so far as to permit the substitution of the opera 'Hippolytus' for that of the originally demanded 'Iphigenia.' When we reflect upon the all-important occasion — nothing less than a gala performance during the forthcoming royal visits — at which Dr. Lothnar's work was to be presented, we realize the extent of the

honour which it was His Majesty's pleasure to bestow, as head of the German Empire, upon a German composer; and we lament the untoward stroke of fate which has befallen this latter at the highest point of his career. It is impossible to obtain any definite information as to Dr. Lothnar's state, so great is the rigorousness of the seclusion in which, by his own wish, or that of his friends, he is now enveloped.

"Unless it is a case of mortal illness, or, as some would have us believe, of mental affliction, we confess ourselves unable to understand the exceedingly premature nature of his decision."

The article was headed: "The Lothnar Riddle." It was of course copied into the local papers; Frankheim read, and was plunged fathoms deeper into depression.

The other disturbing event was the departure of Dr. Webel for a destination unknown. That the conductor should leave his master at such a moment seemed inconceivable; and, while a few optimistic spirits held to the theory either that he had been summoned by the Emperor himself, or had undertaken some secret mission for Lothnar, the opinion of the majority was that it was a case of rats in a sinking ship.

"He knows it's the end; he has just gone off in quietness to look out for another post. There never was any sentiment about our Webel."

This was the tenth day after the death of Reinhardt, and it was upon the afternoon of that day that Sarolta made up her mind to go to the Altschloss.

She slipped out of the Hegemannsche Haus as the dusk

was falling, and, through the fine rain that enveloped the town, took the familiar road — out by the Ost Thor, past the little wooden house; not allowing herself to slacken pace till the gates of the park rose glistening, with the blurred shadows of the trees behind them, in the dim evening light.

The doorkeeper would have stopped her, but upon her desperate lying assurance, "I have been sent for," shrugged his shoulders and let her in. But to Mark, who after a long delay opened a grudging slit of doorway, she dared venture upon no such brazen statement.

Recognizing her, however, he altered his defensive attitude and opened the door widely to address her, shaking his head in solemn negation as he did so:

"Es geht nicht, Fräulein; 's geht nicht."

"Oh, Mark, I must see him! I must!"

Again the man repeated his refusal.

"Impossible."

But, surveying her through the fast falling darkness, he then exclaimed that she was drenched.

"*Na* — to let you go back in that state, in such hound's weather, that I cannot do. If the Master is to lose his soprano, like his tenor, that would indeed be the end! Come in and warm — come and dry yourself — and I will have you driven back. Why, your teeth are chattering! *Gott*, reasonable people you are not, you artists — none of you! *Thee müssen sie trinken, Fräulein.*"

Sarolta's teeth were indeed chattering, but not from cold. She slipped her dripping cloak from her, and hesitated a moment, terrified at her own daring; then, as

the man moved toward the little red room, shot by him up the stairs like a lapwing, deaf to the fierce yet subdued accents that called her back.

Mark lumbered after her; but stopped halfway, flung up his hands with a despairing gesture, and slowly retraced his steps! Sarolta had already turned the handle of the music-room.

Lothnar was no longer sitting in the dark, brooding. There was a shaded lamp on his writing table, and he was pacing the room.

He turned his head and looked, at the sound of the opening door, and did not pause in his slow and measured tramping. He reached the end of the room; came back in the same fashion; he passed, looked at her again—and went on. His glance swept her; that was all.

Without pausing, the steps reached their allotted span. He turned — that he should go by again in this horrible nightmare manner was more than she could endure. She closed the door behind her, and went to meet him. The great fear for him overwhelmed the fear of him.

“Master,” she said — “Master!”

She stretched out her hands. Just for a moment she thought that he would have walked on, across her, against her, over her. But as her hands touched his, he stopped abruptly and laughed. Then he caught those hands and dragged her toward the table.

“*Ach, Sie sind es* — it is you!”

Almost from the first she had been *du* to him. A sense of foreboding seized her — her soul turned to ice within her.

"What do you want with me? How did you come here?"

He disengaged himself from her clinging fingers, tore the shade off the lamp, and then fixed his eyes upon her. A fierce and angry stare it was, out of that pale face, from the cavernous setting of those eyes — eyes that had watched long hours in the dark, straining desperately after a lost vision — eyes that had known in their burning wakefulness no softening of tears.

If they had been mad eyes before, in their hour of triumph and illumination, they were mad indeed now, with the soul's savage rebellion against an immutable decree.

"Let me look at this creature who breaks in upon my sacred solitude, who dares to intrude her puling presence upon me — upon me who have said that I would remain alone. Let me look at her, the bold one! It takes a woman to do these things. Vanity, thou art a woman! Well — what will you have of me? Speak, then, since here you are! What is it? Do I not say to you — speak!"

The words foamed upon his lips, breaking from the angry soreness of his heart as the torrent pent in some secret cavern breaks unexpectedly, raging down the mountain-side. Before she had time to answer him — before indeed she could bring her thoughts together out of the pain and terror that had seized her — he had flung himself from her; had taken one more stormy tramp about the room, and then, as if his strength had suddenly failed, let himself fall into his chair, covering his face with his hand. Convulsive sounds shook him. She did not

know if it was sobbing or laughter; but she felt, all at once, the dry agony that lay waste in his soul; and everything within her melted into a great yearning sorrow for his sorrow. She faltered a step toward him, holding out her arms; then they dropped to her side: he was speaking. Instinct bade her let him speak out his bitterness. Perhaps then she might have a chance to speak in her turn — to tell him that all was not gone from him — that her love might yet bring comfort.

“To be alone — to be alone!” he was saying; “that is not much to ask! Alone — and the darkness! They leave him to lie alone in the dark — why should not I be left — I who have died with him — who am dead too! Lothnar, who was for Art created, is dead! Kill Lothnar’s Art and what of his carcass? . . . what of a dog’s carcass? And was he not all my Art to me? What I conceived in my soul — that he gave out to the world. Without him I am a dumb man. And I loved him — the only creature on earth I loved. . . . What is this?”

She had cast herself on her knees beside him; with frenzied hands she caught his. As he repulsed her, she clutched at his knees, and, as furiously he backed his chair from her, at his very feet:

“Master! — Master! Do not say so! Have you not still got me — your little Sarolta, your Singer? Oh, do not forget that I am Sarolta, whom you said you loved.”

“I?”

He pushed his chair still farther out of her reach, but this time quietly. He sat, looking down upon her.

The fury of grief, which was almost insanity, was gone from him. He seemed to have cast it off as a man may cast a mantle. There was complete self-control in that single cutting interrogation — "I?"

She cried out as if under a blow.

"You loved me — you did love me . . . You kissed me!"

"I kissed you," said Lothnar slowly.

She looked up at him. His face was twisted with a dreadful smile; but he was calm.

A sick dizziness came upon her. She staggered to her feet, groping at the table for support. Was it possible that he had never said he loved her? She sought in the darkness of her mind for memory and could not find it.

Like straws in a whirlpool there floated about her the thoughts of many things that he had said and done; how he had looked upon her; how he had held her — kissed her.

"I will kiss you once, that love may flower on your lips —" but he had not kissed her. "*So eine Phædra wie Sie mir aus dem Herzen gesprungen!*"

"You said — you said —" Her voice trailed off. "What am I to you, then?"

"What you are to me? — Nothing. What were you to me? — A reed that I fashioned into a pipe for my song. You were to me Iphigenia. Then I made of you Phædra. Now my Hippolytus is dead, and there will be no Phædra ever again. I want you no more. Ah, my Hippolytus!" The wildness began to gather anew into voice and eyes.

"The music is mute and for ever. It lies suffocated under that gravestone. You little fool! And I put you with my Hippolytus to live, and you saw that splendour of manhood and it said to you — nothing! Of what were you made, woman? I had to teach you myself. And now it is wasted!"

Suddenly he clutched the arm of his chair. "Out of my sight," he screamed, "you who remind me of my lost creation, my still-born child!"

Sarolta crawled from the room. Like some dumb animal that has been tortured — some poor dog that has received blows from the hand upon which it has fawned — there was in her a blind desire to hide away with her pain. Nothing more.

She had an indistinct impression of Mark endeavouring to arrest her in the hall, and of breaking from him out into the night so fiercely that he had fallen back as if afraid. So the tortured thing may snap at the helping hand. Then, once in the open, she ran. She was alone, and the rain was beating against her face, and it was dark. Lothnar had called for that: to be alone and in the dark! — Ah, how would she ever endure now to be otherwise? Alone, and in the dark! And the rain? It felt against her cheeks like the tears that she would never be able to shed. She was scorched with shame.

She ran till she struck the trunk of a tree, saving her face instinctively with outflung hands. She sank at the foot of it, feeling that all strength had left her.

She knew that she was still somewhere in the Altschloss park, not far perhaps from the spot where she had brought,

on that golden morning, a heart of flaming rapture. Now the rain pattered on myriad leaves about her; once and again the wind would seize the trees wildly and rush away. All was black around her and in her heart — O God, what blackness was there — blackness and scorching flame!

“I?”

That single exclamation “I?” had put her from him more utterly than all his wild words. Those she could have borne. Had he struck her in his angry sorrow, she would have found it in her to kiss the hand that struck. But that word, cutting like a knife, cold as ice, had shown her her place in his arrogant life too surely, too cruelly, to leave room for doubt. She had been his tool to work with, his reed to play upon and be flung aside — a broken thing, no longer needed! He had taken her very soul, and behold! it was no more to him than the dead leaf fluttering from the tree. And she — what had she not thought herself? His beloved, his chosen, his mate — his Singer! The height of her own presumption stared her in the face. “I —?” I, Lothnar, greatest man of the century, Olympian genius . . . and Sarolta Vaneck, the obscure little singer, the reed he had fashioned, played upon, broken and thrown away!

Das Lied ist aus! . . .

It was Friedhelm who used to sing *Die Beiden Grenadiere*; she remembered the tragic passion and glory of his voice upon those very words. . . . Dear Friedhelm! He had thought of her at his last breath. *Hüte Dich,*

Sarolta!" What had he foreseen in that dying vision? Oh, God! was it this hour?

"Oh, Friedhelm, let me die too!"

When she came back to a sense of actual life, she found that her face was all wet. Not from the rain alone, for her lips were salt; and she thought it must have been because of Friedhelm that she had cried. She was aching in every limb and unutterably weary. A moment it seemed that the easiest thing for her to do would be to lie on, lost in the woods, in the night, and let life ebb away from her. Then some remnant of bruised pride, some instinct of virginal distaste, rebelled against the thought. To be found dead in Lothnar's park! — the talk, the gossip, the scandal! . . . Rough, unknown hands of men lifting that dead body of hers that only Lothnar's arm had ever encircled! She shuddered from the vision. And now a new terror came upon her lest she should not have the strength to rise and get away. With trembling hands she shook out her wet skirts, straightened her sodden hat, dragged the soaked veil over her face. Her gloves and her cloak she had forgotten in the hall; she longed for them now as she thrust her chilled fingers as far as possible down the sleeves of her coat.

The gatekeeper stared at her, forgetting to grumble at this belated summons; forgetting even to question in his loutish surprise. She passed from the light of the gate into the misty gloom of the highroad. A slow grin began to spread over the man's face:

"That one lied to me and she has been punished — *tüchtig!*"

And, closing the gate with a clash, he returned to his pipe by the stove corner, with a lively sense of justice fulfilled.

How Sarolta managed to walk the long way back to the Hegemannsche Haus can only be explained by the fact that there are times of transcendent agony of spirit, when the body becomes a mere machine — docile, insentient.

She stood at length upon the familiar doorstep, and, still mechanically, stretched out a numbed hand to the bell. It was then she felt that it might be difficult for her to get up the stairs to her bedroom. And all at once that piercing concentration of inner suffering became a blank, and she knew only a physical craving for the white bed, for the solitude in the dark.

The door was opened violently. Frau Hegemann's angular form became outlined against the inner lamplight. She had a black knitted shawl over her head and was holding it under her chin with a fleshless finger and thumb.

"Where do you come from?"

"I beg your pardon."

To herself Sarolta seemed to speak as from some distant place. So had Friedhelm spoken, the night he died.

"Where do you come from?" The question was repeated so harshly that the girl's dim wits were struck into some comprehension. She answered like a hypnotized child:

"From the Altschloss."

"So—" Frau Hegemann's voice rang with a malignant triumph. "So, fräulein! I thought it even so. Did I not warn you that this is a respectable house? —a house for respectable people? You — what do you look like? The water is dripping off you, and you have leaves in your hat. *Ach*, I ask no question! Find for yourself another lodging. You can send for your luggage; across my threshold you do not pass. I took you in when Frau Reinhardt turned you out, but this is too much! To the Altschloss alone — and no shame on you! One so brazen!"

The words fell now with no more sense upon Sarolta's mind than if the rain had turned to hailstones about her ears. Her eyes were fixed as if fascinated on those skeleton fingers. How could any one expect anything of human softness from a hand like that!

Then she saw the door close against her and gave a helpless cry — "Oh, please let me in!" She heard the click of the lock, and saw the wet panels facing her relentlessly.

She turned, dazed, and looked down the street. The lamplight flickered on the shining pavement.

A droschke, laden with luggage, was crawling up the cobbled roadway. The coachman's head was bent against the driving wind; the sorry jade stumbled and slipped at nearly every step. Sarolta saw, without seeing. She felt a dreadful ebbing away of all her strength. A thought came shooting across her brain. Better, after all, to have died in the woods.

A cry rang out — a cry upon her own name — mixed anguish and joy.

“Sarolta! Sarolta!”

Some one had sprung out of that droschke — some one extraordinarily active and in a very great hurry. And then Sarolta felt warm arms about her, kisses and tears upon her face; and then for a while she did not know anything any more.

CHAPTER XX

"AND so, my dear," said Sady, "when they offered me an engagement for Michaela — Michaela! — I just said to madame: 'I'll chuck the career and go off to Sarolta!' My goodness, every time I've been to 'Carmen,' when that Michaela creature comes in, I said to myself: 'If that isn't the very lowest part any poor singer has ever had to stoop to!' Madame said, 'You've got to begin, child.' And I said, 'When you begin with Michaela, you stay put.'"

She broke off. She knew that look in Sarolta's eyes: not one word of what she had said had reached her friend's mind.

Miss Schreiber gave a little sigh of impatient sadness. It was now nearly a week since she had carried her fainting friend from the doorstep of the Hegemannsche Haus to the nearest hotel. She had clothed her in her own night-garments and put her to bed like a child. She had further watched by her till the morning, though the doctor, promptly called in, had been reassuring, not to say contemptuous of mere feminine vapours:

"*Gelaufen im Nassen, erkaltet, aufgerecht, nichts gegessen — wird nichts!*— run about in the wet, caught cold, eaten no dinner — it is nothing!" Such had been his verdict.

He left a prescription with ammonia in it, and advised a milk, or preferably (being a native) a beer posset. He was so far justified that next day Sarolta had neither fever nor any return of unconsciousness, and that she consented quite obediently to drink the hot milk that her friend insisted upon. But this very docility was part of a condition that frightened Sady far more than would a physical ailment. Sarolta lay as if the very spring of her life had run down.

She expressed no surprise at Sady's presence, no gratitude for her attentions, beyond a certain childlike abandonment to them. She could find no smile for the lively description of her friend's interview with Frau Hegemann, and of the complete manner in which she had routed that "poisonous old lady." (To Frau Hegemann's slanderous insinuations Sady discreetly made no other reference.)

Sady felt that, until she could get Sarolta to confide in her, she could do nothing. "She just seems to me," she said to herself, "to be bleeding to death from a hidden wound."

But Sarolta kept her lips obstinately closed. Only once she said:

"There will be no more music in Frankheim ever again, and my career is broken."

And Sady answered briskly.

"Nonsense! Geniuses always go on like that. That's well known. Think of Wagner — Think of Tennyson! Did not Rossetti bury all his poems in his wife's grave. . . and dig them up afterward? You bet that Lothnar

has got a copy of 'Hippolytus' quite safe somewhere — and you'll be his Phædra all right!"

But Sarolta shuddered, hid her face in her pillow, and moaned: "Never, never!" And when Sady clasped her and tried to comfort and coax the trouble from her, she trembled still more and shrank so pitifully that Sady felt the hidden wound to be one of such agony that it could not bear even her touch.

Long hours Sarolta lay; and long hours her little friend sat by her bed, thinking and wondering.

When she had received that mad scrawl from the wooden house: "I am the most happy, or the most unhappy of women," Sady had made up her mind that she was needed. It had taken her some time to break down madame's opposition and disengage herself from an all-but signed contract. But the American had her own code of friendship and of its duties, and her will was as firm as her temper was sweet. That is the kind of character that gets its own way through life. She had resolved to surprise Sarolta, being anxious, as she phrased it to herself, to walk right into things straight off.

She had driven first to the wooden house, where Rosa had expressed round-eyed surprise at her demand for Fräulein Vaneck. "But the fräulein has gone! Frau Hegemann has taken her away! Our lady here would not keep her! It was the day of the herr's funeral."

It seemed natural enough that the widow should yearn for solitude in her grief; yet Sady gathered something unpleasant from the maid's tone and mien. Witness of the subsequent scene on the steps of the boarding-house,

she was, of course, by no means unprepared for Frau Hegemann's sinister innuendos on the succeeding day:

"You ask an explanation, *fräulein*. I prefer to make no charges. But ask Frau Reinhardt why she refused to keep your friend under her roof, and see if she will answer you! There are things German ladies do not like to talk about."

"You are a vile old woman!" cried Sady, a scarlet spot on each cheek. "I am sure I don't want to know the horrible ideas that sprout in German ladies' minds!"

She had come off triumphant, with the last word; discharged the account; swept all Sarolta's little belongings into her carriage, and royally tipped the panting maid. But she had food for disturbing thought and conjecture. That Sarolta had been at the Altschloss and had there received that deadly soul-wound, she knew by intuition. But what had Lothnar done to her friend? she asked herself. What had passed between them? She could not conceive that the composer, in his strenuous mental life, should ever have had a thought of returning the feeling which the innocent child-singer had lavished upon him; yet the American had a knowledge of men and things beyond her years, and she had always thought Sarolta lovely and gifted above the rest of the world. Perhaps he had played with her adoration, thought Sady, flushing in secret anger — and then had refused to see her, perhaps. Yet that hardly seemed enough. No, she knew that there must be more — something far more deeply affecting all the girl's outlook on life. Had she, herself, not had dire forebodings?

How Sarolta had shuddered at the very name of Phædra! How she had shrunk from her touch — how she had moaned!

Partial elucidation came when Herr Webel returned to Frankheim as unexpectedly as he had left. Once more the whole town buzzed with rumour and excitement. Herr Webel had not returned alone; he had brought one Carolus Peters with him — a Dutchman — who had been last season's success at Covent Garden, in the rôles of Siegfried and Tristan.

The news spread, in spite of all efforts at secrecy, that the orchestra had actually been called together for rehearsal, and that the new tenor had made a private trial of his voice in the theatre.

Then all Frankheim learned that Herr Webel had been to the Hegemannsche Haus to look for Fräulein Vaneck; and that, when its mistress had disclaimed ostentatiously all connection with the young lady, the conductor had stolidly cursed her.

Herr Webel was, however, his usual concentrated and businesslike self when Sady found him in her little sitting-room. He demanded Sarolta.

"Sarolta is ill."

"*Ach, was!*" said he. "A cold?" He tapped his throat under his beard. His round eyes protruded, and a threatening growl came into his tones: it was as though he forbade her to admit such a catastrophe.

"Oh, no — it's not a cold. It's — she's in bed."

"Have you a doctor?"

"No — she's not ill enough for that. Just dreadfully nervous and upset."

The man drew a sibilant breath of relief.

"*Ach so! Ja, natürlich!* Tell her I want to speak to her."

"But she's in bed."

"She will get up."

"Herr Webel ——"

"*Es pressiert, Fräulein.*"

"I will go," said the girl doubtfully, "and tell her ——"

"Tell her I want her to sing in three days' time."

"Good heavens!"

"In 'Iphigenia,' for Dr. Lothnar. Tell her—for Dr. Lothnar."

"I don't suppose for a moment," said Sady from the door, "that she will be able to crawl out of bed."

"Tell her I can't wait long."

Sady did not know whether she was more amused or angry, as she went on her errand. But, at her very first words, the Teuton's self-sufficient certainty stood justified. A light leapt into Sarolta's far-away eyes, colour into her cheeks. She, whom her friend had thought sometimes so exhausted and weary that she could never catch on to life again, bounded from her pillows with the movements of a healthy child.

"Quick, Sady, quick! Oh, dear, couldn't you do my hair while I put on my stockings? Just a plait and two hairpins, anyway. Oh, any dress! Sady, Sady!" She only paused once in her frenzied haste, to catch at her friend's hands. "Did he say Dr. Lothnar had sent

him — for me? — for me? Oh, Sady — oh, you don't know what it means!"

"He said it was for Dr. Lothnar," said Sady slowly. She did not exactly know why, but this joy of her friend seemed more piteous than her sorrow.

As Sarolta rushed in, Herr Webel regarded her with a German disfavour of dishevelled locks and excited womanhood. Frau Bertha, with her symmetrical waves of hair, her trim, aproned figure; Frau Bertha, who had cooked so well for her husband while he lived, and smoothed the sheet so tidily over him when he died — that was his ideal.

"Please, *fräulein*, be seated," he said — Sady thought with the air of a dentist addressing a nervous patient.

The eager question died unspoken on Sarolta's lips. Arrested in her headlong advance, she sat meekly as she was bidden, twisting her hands together, her colour fluctuating. She went quite white before Herr Webel had finished the exposition of his errand.

The light died out of her face as if some inner flame had been extinguished — Lothnar had not sent for her! Herr Webel was no ambassador from the Altschloss. It was something very different indeed. It was this: the Master's friends were so alarmed by his continued apathy, that, in the hope of rousing him from it, a plan had been formed among them — a singular, an almost desperate plan — in the hopes of surprising him back into the love of his own work again; in other words, into a zest for life once more.

To this end it was proposed to give a performance of

"Iphigenia" in the little disused theatre of the Altschloss, and to lure Lothnar to be present at the last moment. A tenor had been found for Achilles — one whose voice could be compared to Friedhelm's.

"The same it is not," said Webel. He was talking solemnly to the two girls, almost as if he liked to rehearse out loud the many arguments he had addressed to himself in support of his scheme. "Two voices are never the same. But it is a good voice. And we will not have too much light on the scene. In his armour and helmet, and the rest, he will pass. He is a stout fellow. *Na* — even if he makes the Master angry, that will be something. Then the Master will say perhaps to me: 'You fool to bring me such an one! — Why, in Frankheim alone I could have picked a better.' And perhaps he will try to put his word to the proof. *Na* — at any rate we will have shown him the Achilles is not everything in his great work — I, with my orchestra, and the rest of his picked ones: you, too, *fräulein*, we will show him that all is not Achilles. Will there not be his own Agamemnon, his own Clytemnestra — his own Iphigenia?"

He paused.

"Singen müssen Sie, Fräulein."

Sarolta's white face became once more suffused with crimson.

"I will sing." Defiance was in that cry — defiance of her own weakness, perhaps, or defiance of Fate. The man bent his brows.

"You can sing? Your friend says you've been ill."

Sarolta flung her angry glance toward Sady; then,

without a word, sprang to her feet and ran to the piano. She struck a few chords and her voice rang out. In her extremity she did not hesitate in her choice; it was Phædra's first song upon which she ventured — a wail, high-pitched and rising ever higher, as the voice of a lamenting woman will rise, till it seems as if it must break upon its own height of misery. Only perhaps Lothnar's art and Sarolta's voice could have ventured upon such a test of sound.

The orchestral accompaniment to this was a mysterious current of rich yet low sounds: it somehow conveyed an impression as of dark and sullen waters under a dark sky, between which circled the desperate flight of a white bird fighting against the wind. Even now, though her fingers only sketched a note or two of supporting accompaniment, the effect was extraordinary.

Webel drew a long breath.

"*Na, es war doch grossartig!* A pity for the 'Hippolytus'!" he muttered in his beard. Then, abruptly: "It still goes, Fräulein Sarolta," he said and rose from his seat. "With the voice there is nothing amiss. You will be told the time of rehearsals."

He gave two jerky bows, took up his hat, and departed without another word.

Sarolta remained standing by the piano, staring straight before her. It was the look her friend dreaded.

"Oh, darling!" cried the little American, moved, she knew not why, almost to tears. "Your voice is divine: but it's just heart-breaking — Sarolta, I don't think you're fit to sing."

Sarolta came back to the things about her with a fierce start. She put Sady's arm away from her, and said slowly, between her teeth:

"Don't you understand it's life or death to me!"

Sady looked at the set face and the unyouthful strain in the eyes, thoughtfully and in silence.

"Of course you'll sing, honey," she said at last, in soothing, everyday tones. "Better than ever, too. I've never heard you in such voice."

But that very afternoon she sent a telegram to Sir John Holdfast. It was couched in these words:

Your chance at last. Don't stop for luncheon. — SADY.

Though the tone of this message was jocose, the girl's heart was heavy with foreboding as she handed it over to the official.

CHAPTER XXI

IT WAS a work of difficulty to fit the orchestra into the little private, old-world theatre of the Altschloss — designed for the *bergeries à la Watteau*, and the powder and patch artificialities of bygone days — and Webel had not only to make some elimination in its ranks, but to order a lowering of all effects to fit the narrowed surroundings. A temporary scheme of lighting had also to be arranged; and the conductor, with endless patience and ingenuity, had devised schemes which should throw certain figures into light and yet keep shadowy the make-shift background and the exiguous stage.

“I will have,” he explained, “a kind of dream performance. You understand, all of you: the Master sitting yonder, alone, in the dark, must see you here as in a dream. Everything must be low-toned but exquisite. I will have it perfect, but dim. You must watch over yourselves: nothing violent, nothing breaking out; yet every shade kept in its lowered measure, as it were seen in twilight. Nothing lost, I repeat, yet all subdued.”

Never, perhaps, had the good man spoken so much, or so earnestly. The deep poetry inherent in the Teutonic nature pierced now through his stolid personality.

When Sarolta found herself that evening one of the group in the faded anteroom adjoining the stage, it

seemed to her, indeed, as if she were in a dream. The unfamiliar spaces about her: Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, the High Priest, the *Choros*, familiar figures in familiar garments, yet looking somehow strangely unlike themselves; and Achilles, clad in the armour she knew so well, had so horrible a resemblance to the beloved Achilles of their happy days, that every time he turned his head, the horrible dissimilarity struck her like a blow. It had all the grotesque pain of a nightmare.

There was a constrained sense of expectation. No one knew what this night would bring forth; and though Webel was confident of luring the Master down to the theatre, there was still the possibility of his refusing to be present, and of the whole undertaking ending in abject futility.

Nothing could begin until Webel reappeared with the news of success or failure. The new Achilles, obviously repenting of his heart-whole proffer of himself, concealed a real nervousness under airs of growing and sullen impatience — shoulder-shrugs and such. Clytemnestra suddenly announced that she would scream if something did not happen soon. No one paid any attention to her; but Agamemnon, declaring that he was cold, put his fur-lined coat over his Greek robes with fantastic effect. Sarolta's teeth were chattering.

Webel suddenly appeared in the doorway, so quietly that it seemed to her still part of the dream. He was very pale, but extraordinarily calm.

"All is in order," he said, "I go to my place in the orchestra." He paused. Through his glasses, his round

eyes moved from one to the other. "I must beg you all" — there crept a note of emotion into his low tones — "to remember my instructions; to remember above everything that each of you holds to-night our beloved Master's fate, so to speak, in his hands. You will sing to a dark theatre, and to but one person. But never in your lives will you sing to such an important audience or to such momentous issues!" He ended with a quaint gesture of his hands that was almost a folding of them. "*Gott gebt uns alle Muth!*" he said, and with that prayer upon his lips, went as quietly as he had come.

The next thing Sarolta knew was the stealing upon her ear of the well-remembered strains of the Overture. The opera began with the march of the impatient and weary soldiers in Aulis. It used to grow as if from the distance, into splendid clangour, barbaric blare and clash, till the very eye seemed full of the pageant and movement of the youth of a world of heroes. Now she realized, though but vaguely, with what a superb command of his art the conductor was contriving to keep low every effect yet not mar one of them. It was a vision of the past; but, as he had wished, a vision in a twilight reverie.

Agamemnon rose and went forth, joined by the group of warriors; the armour clanked as they went by her; then she could hear the tramping on the boards of the stage. Two or three of the Greek maidens crept closer to the stove; and Clytemnestra, with a twisted smile, caught up Agamemnon's cast-off fur coat, and wrapped it round her. She went then toward the wing and stood watching.

Presently Agamemnon's voice, deep-noted, broke across the music, and Clytemnestra came back toward Iphigenia:

"Brrr! child," she said, "I tell you this likes me not. The black theatre, empty and cold, with but that one creature in it — and he, they say, mad! I'm glad you go in before me. How white you look! Don't you rouge for the first act? . . . You are not listening to a word I say. Ugh! what am I doing here? I feel as if I were the only live flesh and blood being among ghosts."

Clutching the fur across her capacious breast, she went back into the room, calling in whispers upon Carolus Peters to let her pinch him to see if he, at least, were real.

Sarolta sat on as if turned to stone; all bodily sensation had well-nigh left her. With an intensity born of her single passion, she felt the tragic presence, solitary in the black chasm of the theatre; she flung her soul out upon each wave of music; calling him back from a grave deeper than the dead man's, to Life and Art again. Lothnar, whom she loved, who had kissed her soul awake, who had called the red fire into her life — yonder he was, in his sorrow! . . . She must forget that last hour with him, forget those terrible wounds that he had dealt her pride, her self-confidence, her very womanhood. Perhaps, if she sang as she used to sing — nay, surely to-night she must sing as never before, did not she hold his fate in her hands, as Webel had said? — she might be once again his singer to him . . . "his Singer, sprung from his heart!" No, it was of Phædra he had

so spoken, not of Iphigenia. Oh, if it were only Phædra to-night! She was not Iphigenia any more . . . she was Phædra, burning away, wasting, dying for one whisper, one sign of love! . . . Phædra!

The dream music rolled on; and the Iphigenia theme was being woven into the rough, agonized, storm-driven cadences that ever beat round the figure of Agamemnon — the theme of Iphigenia, pure, exquisitely young, flower-fresh, piteous in its very joy and confidence of life! But in her soul it was the wail of Phædra that now was resounding, the desperate flight of the white bird against the gale — bitter waves below, black clouds above. . . .

Sarolta started. Clytemnestra was shaking her:

"Aber, Kind, they're waiting. Haste!"

Webel, with his master coolness, glided his orchestra into a repetition of the passage.

"Vater, mein Vater!" angrily hissed the prompter.

Sarolta sprang to her feet, and ran upon the stage like a hunted thing.

"Vater, mein Vater!" . . . Iphigenia's entrance was heralded by that cry, shrill and gay as the pipe of a shepherd on the hill-top. Only yesterday Webel had had special praise — unwonted favour — for her rendering of those opening notes. To-night she caught up the cry, as she ran, true and pure enough; but, once on the stage, with the gloomy throbbing of the Agamemnon music about her, there came upon her an extraordinary hallucination. It seemed to her that she was not Iphigenia, but Phædra; that, from where he sat in the darkness

Lothnar was calling it out to her: "Iphigenia never again, but Phædra — my Phædra!" She fought against the madness. Instinctively her bodily senses tried to keep to the ordered theme; as if it belonged to some one else, she heard her own voice waver on the girlish tenderness of the words:

"Father — be mine, all mine to-day —
Oh, smooth thy knitted brow, unbend and smile!"

But even as Agamemnon's hands embraced her shoulders, the illusion returned, in fuller force this time. This was Lothnar's touch upon her! He was speaking to her quite clearly now, through the confusion of a music which no longer meant anything in her ear! "Between the white of the Iphigenia fire and the white of Phædra's fire, there lies the red! . . . You can go back never again!"

How silly they all were to play that Iphigenia music, when it was Phædra he wanted her to be! . . . Since she was Phædra, why did this man hold her? No man held Phædra: she was all to him who scorned her.

She wrenched herself from Agamemnon's clasp, which had tightened in amazement upon her, turned full upon the dark abyss of the auditorium and flung out the whole strength of her voice to that unseen silent one, in Phædra's lament; in those notes, first stammered, passion white, to his teaching.

A wave of Webel's bâton brought a crescendo to drown those piercing tones. Clytemnestra caught her by the elbow. She heard a savage whisper: "You have lost

your senses!" A low-muttered order, and once again the orchestra, with hardly a hesitation, went back upon its theme.

She broke from the spell that held her, to the hideous reality. With eyes like those of an angry cat, Webel was glaring at her over his desk. It seemed to her as if all the eyes of the orchestra were upon her too, upbraiding, raging. And Agamemnon's, Clytemnestra's, the warriors'. . . worse than all, unseen eyes from that darkness — searing her with scorn!

It was her cue — light, caressing, tender:

Smooth thy knitted brow, unbend and smile!

Then, hoarsely the notes came. The playful turn upon the last words should once more have fallen like the artless measure of the shepherd's pipe, innocent of any emotion but that of a mere joy of life. Sarolta felt her breath fail upon them. She tried to catch the note; missed, made a desperate leap of all her strength to reach the next bar, could bring forth nothing but a strangled sob.

A moment she stood, struck rigid by the horror of her own disaster. The unity of the instruments wavered and broke. The conductor's bâton fiercely rapped the desk, and there descended an awful silence — in the midst of which a laugh rang out at her! A laugh from the depth of the darkness that beat upon her as if with whips, and drove her from the stage, running, stumbling in agonized haste to escape from it.

She brushed past Achilles, who hung about the wing;

and though the ejaculation he flung at her had no meaning in her ear, she knew that he looked at her as if he could have killed her.

The execrations of every one pursued her — he knew that. She had failed Webel, who had put such issues into her hands; she had failed those who worked with her; she had spoiled, perhaps irretrievably, the chances of the new Achilles. But what was it all to the knowledge that she had failed Lothnar! Oh, that laughter! Would she ever get it out of her soul, that jeering, contemptuous, bitter, mad laughter!

No one tried to stop her as, blindly, she rushed across the artists' room toward the antechamber beyond. But it was, after all, into Sady's arms that she ran — Sady, who had been forbidden to come this night, yet had followed in secret and waited, wrapped in her furs — a little monument of devoted patience.

Sady had not the least idea of what was happening, shut off in the little cold hall. But one glance was enough: her worst foreboding had been fulfilled. It was her own wraps that she flung round the distraught creature, still in the lovely flutter of those Greek robes, in which once she had touched such heights of joy and triumph — and, without a question, led her friend tenderly to the carriage she had kept in waiting without, and bade the driver hurry back to the hotel.

As they were carried through the darkness of the avenue, still there was silence between them; only Sady drew her comrade into her embrace, with a gesture that was maternal in its pity. And Sarolta lay, as one broken,

shaken from head to foot by long shudderings. Only once she spoke:

"Oh, Sady, Sady!" she cried; and then clinging: "Sady, take me away!"

"Yes, yes, darling," soothed Sady, and thought of her telegram with a little inner comfort in the midst of the desolation she shared so truly.

"Take me away!" that was Sarolta's repeated cry during the night that followed. She lay in the kind arms that had caught her in the moment of her utmost need; but no warmth of love, no soothing of the most delicate ingenuity of tenderness could touch the restless misery that possessed her.

To be away from Frankheim, from the place where she had known such bliss and anguish — away from those eyes that had shot wrath upon her, from the sound of the reproaching voices, from the echo of that laughter, to be hidden away — that was all she wanted.

As a woman Lothnar had contemned her; as an artist he had mocked her. Like a devastating fire, the power of the man had come over her, consumed all that was lovely and trusting and tender in her nature and had left her waste. . . . And in the end he had laughed!

If he went mad now (as people said he might), or if he died, they who had been her comrades would heap the blame upon her, and no one would ever know that he had driven her mad first. No one must ever know this: that he had made of her a Phædra, and had killed the Iphigenia in her!

As the hours of that long tortured night fell away, numbered maddeningly by the belfries of Frankheim, the shrinking horror grew upon her to frenzy. Sady, who would gladly have delayed another day in anticipation of John Holdfast's arrival — she had had no answer from him, but anxiously expected his appearance at any moment — found herself obliged to prepare for the earliest possible start.

Their trunks were packed, the bill paid; Sarolta sat, clothed for the journey, shivering in spite of her furs, waiting for the moment of departure in the little sitting-room, while Sady surveyed the loading of the luggage in the hall below. Miss Schreiber had resolved not to bring her friend much farther than Cologne, where they could rest amid new surroundings, and from where she could communicate afresh with Sir John Holdfast.

Even as the last box was being hoisted on the top of the gay red and green omnibus, a droschke drove furiously up to the door, and out of it leaped a travelled-stained, very energetic young man. Sady ran forward at sight of the well-known broad figure, in the loose-skirted sporting coat. The feeling of solid British honesty and steadfastness which John Holdfast always brought about with him, filled her soul with a sense of relief so acute that she nearly burst into tears.

"Oh, Johnny, Johnny!" she cried, holding out both hands.

Sarolta had drawn her armchair close to the stove and sat huddled against its warmth, waiting on, with

a kind of dazed impatience. At the sound of the opening door, she drew her thick veil over her face and rose.

"How long you've been!" she said pettishly without turning her head, as she tied the folds of gossamer under her chin.

"Sarolta!"

There was a note of exhilaration in Sady's voice that commanded attention.

Sarolta looked then, and through the web of gray saw mistily the good face all knotted with anxiety, and yet somehow radiant with hope, of her faithful lover. She made a blind movement toward him, hardly knowing that she did so.

He was beside her — he had caught her hands:

"I am here," he was saying in his blundering way —

"I am here, Sarolta."

"*Some day, one never can tell, you may want a friend,*" had he said to her long ago in Paris. If ever forlorn human creature wanted a friend it was she! And Johnny was here.

"She just fell against him," said Sady to herself afterward, thinking back upon the scene.

Thus a child who in search of fairy adventure has lost its way in the alluring cruel woods and been found again may fall into the arms of its nurse, the safe and natural refuge, and think it peace.

It was only Johnny — no lover to bring fire and joy, no Titan to lift the soul off its standing-place and whirl it to heights of unbelievable rapture — but only poor humdrum, long-suffering, inevitable, unchanging Johnny.

CHAPTER XXII

(TWO YEARS LATER)

MADAME COSTANZA emerged, with some difficulty but not without dignity, from the station fly, mounted the steps of Chilburgh Castle and crossed its granite portico with an alacrity that amazed the footman following behind her. Two years more of jovial life had increased those majestic proportions (and the lines of a fashionable purple tailor-made did not serve to disguise them) but the lady's energy was unimpaired by time, or weight. So superb was the condescension with which she swept in upon them that footman and butler gave way before her as if her appearance had been not only an expected but an honouring event.

"Lady Holdfast is at home? That is well. You need not ask — you can announce me." She paused, wreathed in smiles. "I am an old friend," she said in her precise English. "Your mistress will be very glad to see me."

The butler was too well trained to allow the smallest responsive softening of his own countenance. He ushered the visitor, across the marble spaces of the hall, into a room on the right, requested her name, and departed with the non-committal assurance that he would inform her ladyship.

Madame Costanza stood in the middle of the room and chuckled.

"Inform her ladyship!" she mimicked to herself. "*Ma petite* Sarolta!" And then she looked about her, with an eye of lightning appreciation. "Faith, we are finely lodged! . . . *Saperlipopette* if those garlands are not du Grinling Gibbons, my adoration! And old masters — a Rubens, I'll swear. A Rubens, early manner. . . . *Dieu, quel portrait!* The folds of that blue dress, swirling down the canvas . . . what a lesson for some of those young moderns!" She moved about the room with her wonderful alert tread: "Hob-bema — Giorgione. What a thing it is to have ancestors! It was never our Johnny who collected those treasures — I'll lay my head to that! Hey, the beautiful room! How mellow, how rich, how deep-toned, how subdued — how perfectly *dans le cadre!* Not a thing to leap to the eye, except those little flames round the logs on the great hearth. They have their merit, these barbaric open hearths!"

Madame Costanza's peregrinations had brought her to the writing table. Here she paused, surveying its fittings. With a sudden crow of laughter she recognized her own photograph:

"Aha! here is the great Laura Costanza! It does one pleasure, all the same, not to be quite forgotten . . . ! Sady Schreiber too, with her pretty *minois* . . . *à croquer!* Is all the gallery here? No, no," repeated the observer thoughtfully, "neither Friedhelm nor Lothnar! Who is this splendid person with her robes of coronation?"

She lifted the massive silver frame and scrutinized the portrait. There was a dedication which she read: "Yours affectionately, Vera Warborough."

She replaced it with an expressive sniff. "As long as I don't find Sir Pringle to make the *pendant*! No, *Dieu merci*, it is an old lady. Do I not know her, that one? Yes, I do. Ah, it is the little fat dame, at the *Schöne Aussicht*, she who could not bear to hear the word 'stomach.' *La pauvre!*"

Madame chuckled as she contemplated the portly presentment. "What does she say? 'Darling Sarolta, from the godmother.'"

"Darling Sarolta! . . ." The singing-mistress laid this photograph also out of her hand, with some scorn. "We sing another song now! This is a base world. What is she doing then, that little Sarolta, *de me faire le pied de grue*? Is she by chance become grand, with all this grandeur? Eh — that would not suit me any day, above all not to-day."

With an air of severity upon her countenance, corresponding to the thought, she turned at the sound of the opening door. But as Sarolta entered, every emotion was superseded in her old mistress's affectionate heart, by the pleasure of the meeting. Sarolta was folded in the well-remembered capacious embrace.

"*La voilà, cette enfant, la voilà!*" madame repeated, between resounding kisses. "Is it possible? The little Sarolta who gave me such a time of it!"

Here she held her pupil at arm's length and her hawk's-eyes scrutinized: "*Et avec ça*, it is not the same Sarolta

at all! Heavens, how changed you are — *une beauté!* Ah, but where is my little prima donna?"

"I don't know," said Lady Holdfast slowly.

These were the first words she had spoken, and they came with a smile; but the vivacious teacher had a sudden impression of chill.

"Ugh," she said, moving toward the hearth. "What a climate you have, you English!"

They sat opposite to each other and there fell silence. Madame Costanza stared first at Sarolta and then at the rosy, flame-lit logs, marshalling her conclusions: "Dressed to perfection, even in the country. . . . Gray tailor-made, lingerie blouse — the simplicity that costs the eyes out of the head! And *coiffée!* by a French maid, for a wager. No paint. *Elle ne s'amuse pas*, after the fashion of your modern 'smart.' But then what a skin! — as fine as those pearls at ears and throat . . . and that's not saying little! *Ce pauvre* Johnny, he does not do things by halves! And how she suits the luxurious setting! Talk of birth! She's imposing now, positively imposing, the little Polish one, brought up in the house of Mosenthal! And she sits and she smiles at me, and does not even care to put the question: What brings you? What do you want? with me? Ah, ça, she used not to be marble. Well, Sarolta," cried madame aloud, "I've come all this way north to pay you a little visit, you see."

Sarolta's straight eyebrows quivered into a faint curve of interrogation, but there was nothing lacking in the cordiality of the words:

"Oh, madame, how good of you! How delightful for me! You have come to stay, of course? Johnny will be so pleased."

"No," said madame, rather dryly. "I have not come to stay, my dear. My fly is waiting. I take the 6:40 train back to London. You can give me a cup of tea, by-and-by — no more. And as for — " she hesitated on the old familiar appellation, then corrected herself formally — "as for Sir John, I hope we may meet, but I am glad to have been able to speak to you first. *Voyons*, Sarolta," she broke out, with irrepressible impatience, "have you no desire to know what can have brought me — me, Costanza?" — the familiar gesture indicated that unmistakable personality — "three hundred miles north, away from my occupations, to seek you?"

Lady Holdfast shot a swift startled look between her long black lashes at the speaker.

"Well, I hoped," she said then, with an air of gentle gayety that played on the surface of eye and lip — no deeper — "that you might be taking us on your way somewhere, and perhaps be able to stay a few days — to pay us a little visit."

"Visit! Have I time for visits? When I go to Purgatory, my love, that will be my first opportunity for a visit of pleasure. No, no; when I come to people, even to you, my angel — it is on business. But to show how good my manners are, we will talk a little about yourself first. How does it go? Need I ask, eh? Sir John, the pearl of husbands? Of course. Little ones? No little ones! How is that possible?"

"I don't know," said Sarolta. In her turn, she was looking thoughtfully into the flames.

Madame Costanza flung another of her searching looks at the set face; at the hands lying listlessly one across the other. Something she knew of the story of Sarolta's last night in Frankheim — enough for her rich imagination to develop, after its own dramatic fashion. But whatever trouble the past had held, the present was, surely, satisfactory enough. After two years of prosperous married life with an adoring young husband, Sarolta ought not to look so strangely unlike herself. It was unnatural! She could not reconcile the girl she had known, the wayward, impulsive, eager, April-creature — with this woman of unyouthful detachment, of coldness and apathy.

"Well," she proceeded, probing, "and are you quite content? No hankerings after the old life? No regrets to have exchanged the glory of the prima donna for the majesty of the châtelaine? Quite content to use your voice for little drawing-room songs?"

"I don't sing at all," said Sarolta harshly. She looked straight at Madame Costanza. A sombre gleam in the depths of those eyes that, up to this, had held such indifference.

"You don't sing! What — what is this absurdity?" the other screamed. Once again she swept her surroundings with a glance of comprehensive scrutiny:

"It is true, there is no piano. Your own sitting-room, and no piano! Ah, I felt the moment I entered there was something wanting, and it was that! . . . What is the meaning of this?"

"But it is quite simple. It means I don't care to sing."

"You — you! Do I hear aright? Is this Sarolta speaking to me? Sarolta Vaneck, with the voice of the century!"

Lady Holdfast's pale face grew a shade paler; but her lips still had their freezing smile as she answered:

"You forget, madame, that Sarolta Vaneck does not exist any more."

"*Ah bien!*" exclaimed madame.

The other rose and stood looking down at her friend, the angry fire deepening in her eyes and belying her air of chill composure.

"Eh, what is this?" went on the genial lady. "You are not at all dead, let me tell you, while you can look like that. Ah, I thought you had grown into a pretty dummy at first; but now — *j'aime mieux ça!* Yes, yes, she still lives, the old Sarolta. Let me tell you what is the matter with you: you bore yourself, my dear; your artist soul is pining for an outlet in all this stifling luxury and grandeur. I come, it seems, in the very nick of time!" She drew herself out of her chair in her turn and, with one of those unsurpassably dramatic gestures, produced a telegram from her travelling-bag. She flourished the orange envelope before Sarolta's eyes, then shook out the pink sheet and flapped it open, tapping it with her large white finger. "Listen — this is what I received this morning:

"Find Sarolta at once. LOTHAR."

With a sharp movement Lady Holdfast covered her eyes with one hand, while with the other she felt for the

ledge of the chimney-piece. . . . How long ago, and in what other life, was it that a girl had stood palpitating before her teacher and heard the first message from Lothnar, which was to mean such a rending experience! She drew her breath stormily; but if she had learned nothing else these long two years, she had learned self-control.

"Yes, he wants you again!" pursued Madame Costanza. "*Rien que ça, ma chère.* After two years — a pretty compliment, let me tell you! You know, of course, about the Mourning Symphony upon which he has been working. *Comment?* You do not know! Is it possible? What kind of an existence have you condemned yourself to, my *pauvre petite*? The great Symphony, the new inspiration that has saved Lothnar's life and reason. His Memorial to Friedhelm Reinhardt! But it is the musical event of the age! Oh, marvels are again taking place at Frankheim, I assure you. On this next anniversary of his friend's death, Lothnar steps again before the world. The Opera House is reopened, Frankheim lives again! The Grand-Duke is enchanted. It is said that the Kaiser has signified his intention of being present. What a man, this Lothnar! He brings every one to his feet in the end! You see, Germany thought she had lost one of her glories. Eh, eh, he has made them miss him! It is an art I never learned. But the Symphony! Lothnar has planned it all with the faithfulness of a woman: such a monument to a friend! Who would have thought he had it in him to care for any one like that? As for the work, I am told it is unsurpassable — a tragic splendour! Ah, *mais!* — "

She paused. Lady Holdfast had now placed both hands on the high stone mantel-shelf and was leaning her brow against them, staring into the fire. Madame surveyed her a trifle nervously; executed for her own satisfaction a most expressive grimace, and proceeded in falsely confident tones:

"It is orchestral — symphonic — with a chorus of men's voices, and one of boys', but only one solo part — the soprano. In fine, such a singular conception that it takes a Lothnar to carry it through. All marches to perfection. One thing only is wanting — the soprano that will satisfy our genius. I sent him five — five!" screamed Madame Costanza, rapidly ticking the number off on her outspread hand. "They were of every colour, to suit every conceivable taste: he would have none of them! He has broken five hearts, not to speak of my own — but that is a detail. . . . Then he begins to insult me by telegram; I return the compliment. In the end, 'he will look out for himself,' says he. I reply: 'Good luck!' But I say to myself: 'Wait a bit, my fine fellow! You'll come back to me — as usual.' That was three months ago. And on this my little season visit to London, what should pursue me? Another telegram, re-directed from Paris — the telegram I have just read to you: 'Find Sarolta at once. Lothnar.' You know what that means?"

There was a silence. Madame's breath came a little quickly; she stood, reflecting anxiously upon her whilom pupil. "She would make a *furor*," thought she. "Her nerves have had a chance: the repose, the country life,

the perfect material comfort — if the spirit has been starved, the body has profited! She has become a splendid woman, that little overstrung Polish girl. No matter if it has kept silent: from such a chest the voice can only come forth improved, or I do not know my *métier*. Come," she cried aloud, "*ma belle enfant*, you will be the great artist once more — it need only be once. And if you are not tempted to consent for the sake of the old mistress who always loved you, and did her best for you — I don't conceal from you, my child, that it means a great deal to me if a pupil of mine has this triumph — consent for the sake of the memory of the good man who was also your friend. It is the only tribute you can give him; it will be a magnificent one."

Sarolta lifted her head slowly. She was very pale.

"You ask the impossible," she said at last, in a colourless voice. "Look, madame: do you see that heap of white ash down there? It is consumed; it is finished. You cannot expect flame out of it any more. Well, it is like that with me."

A moment Costanza's brown eyes dilated with a startled expression; then she went down on her knees with her astounding agility, and began to puff upon the heap of ashes with an energy that made her look like some monstrous cherub on an Italian ceiling.

"Ah!" With a scream of triumph she scrambled up again, and caught her hostess's hands. "There is the flame, my dear. It was red all the time, under the white."

"Red under the white," repeated Sarolta. She snatched her hands away and flung herself upon the sofa,

once more hiding her face. "You don't know what you are asking of me," she whispered.

"It cannot be that you are afraid of failing!" cried madame, all at once at the height of a tempest of wrath.

Lady Holdfast shook her head. "You are not going to try and make me believe that your voice is gone — me, Costanza, who have had the treatment of half the prima donnas in the world these twenty years! Ha, I'm glad of that! You are afraid of your husband, perhaps? It will annoy him. . . ."

Again the mute answer, emphatic in its denial.

"How is it possible then? Do you not want a triumph once again, after the stupidity, the fiasco at the Altschloss — which was none of your fault, *en parenthèse* — Sady told me about it. Ho — Webel with his bright idea! I should like to give him my opinion upon that precious function! Such nonsense! All Lothnar wanted was to be left alone for a while. They could not do that. Save us from our friends! — Well, come, if you won't do it for Reinhardt's memory, or for my sake, or for your own satisfaction, do it for Lothnar, then!"

This was a risky card to play and she knew it. But it was her last and madame played it with a splendid courage.

"For Lothnar!" Lady Holdfast straightened herself, dropped her hands from before her face. "For Lothnar," she repeated. "For his sake! for the sake of the man who —" She got up and approached Madame Costanza. "Do you know what that man did to me — what he did to me? I was so young, I knew nothing —

a little fool. He came like a fire across my life, and left — nothing.

“You asked me just now if I had children. I said to myself: Does a dead woman have children? I was glad to be dead: it was peace at least. Now you come, calling me to life again — Life is torture! You have blown on the fire under the white ash, and it burns, it burns.”

Madame Costanza’s large, warm, forceful clasp once more seized upon the slender hands.

“But you will sing — you will sing!” she said.

Sarolta looked into the hawk-like eyes, devouring and commanding, fierce in their desire. Once more she felt herself in the grip of the Artist’s ruthless egoism. So that Art be served, what mattered the suffering, the sacrifice? — Nay, if from the tortured soul should rise a purer cry, was it not all gain? An overwhelming sensation of helplessness stole over her.

“Yes,” she said, like one hypnotized, “I suppose I shall sing.”

And out of her unexpected surrender sprang unexpectedly a fierce desire. Yes, she would sing — if only once again. The red still burned under the white!

Madame drew a gasping breath of relief, plumped down on the sofa, and drew the other beside her.

“You have given me a pretty fright!” she ejaculated.

But though “Sarolta” had thus consented, “Lady Holdfast” had still many things to discuss, and conditions to impose, which she did with restored calmness and a

great deal of determination. She had deliberately cut herself aloof from the artist's life; and, even with Sady, correspondence had languished. She knew nothing, refused to know anything of what had happened at Frankheim after her flight. But now she questioned. Lothnar had left the place, very shortly after herself, she was now informed; had taken a sudden horror of it, had fled to the Tyrol, where he had lived in complete seclusion, seeing only Webel and a few other picked friends. The little town had languished, forlorn; but the Master had recovered what was life to him, his inspiration. The last year the *Trauer Symphonie* had occupied his every thought.

"If I sing," said Sarolta, ponderingly at last, "it must be as Sarolta Vaneck. If Dr. Lothnar has heard of my marriage — "

"He has not!" screamed the other. "Why *ma pauvre enfant*, that monster of genius, if you think he has as much as asked after you, or any of his singers! Bah, with that one, it is only when you are wanted that you are remembered!"

She spoke out of the intensity of her desire, not meaning to be brutal, but at the look upon Sarolta's face she caught herself up and went on in softer accents:

"*Voyons*, Sarolta — how could he have heard anything, when in Frankheim itself not a soul knows of you and your Sir John! Does not this very telegram prove his ignorance?"

Lady Holdfast fixed her glance searchingly upon the speaker's face — but madame's eyes were the mirror of a very honest soul — then gave a little sigh:

"If it is understood, then, that my married name is not to be brought into it, not to be made known — "

"Nothing more simple, my dear. As for Lothnar, I shall simply wire:

"I have Sarolta. She consents.'"

"Wait a moment," said Lady Holdfast. She laid her white hand, with its sparkling weight of rings, upon the singing-mistress's cheerfully gesticulating arm. "There is yet another point; I will study the part with you, and attend one rehearsal at Frankheim before the performance, but that is all: except for this I will not meet Dr. Lothnar."

This was the signal for the good lady to *jeter les hauts cris*, what she herself would have described as "the high cries." But Lady Holdfast was immovable. They could have an understudy in case, at that one rehearsal, she failed to please the composer. She would herself pay the understudy, should there be any difficulty on the score of money.

Madame Costanza gazed at her, pursing her lips.

There fell a silence; and in the silence, the teacher's expressive countenance became set into lines of sadness that were almost tragic. Frank, impulsive creature as she was, there were unexpected delicacies and reticencies in her nature. She never spoke of the sorrows of her own life — neither would she seek to probe the wounds of another. But what had Lothnar done to this child!

"You have suffered much, *ma fille*," she said at last. Her deep voice vibrated. It was as if all the passionate grief of her own existence had awakened in sympathy.

Then her unconquerable optimism rose uppermost once more:

"But one sings none the worse for that — believe me," she added cheerfully.

"I knew you would tell me so," said Sarolta, with a little angry laugh.

Madame surveyed her again in silent reflection: prudently she gave another turn to the conversation:

"And you really expect me to make conditions with Lothnar? Conditions with Lothnar, *juste ciel!*"

"It is for him to accept or refuse," said Sarolta. If the composer could not trust them both sufficiently, there was no more to be said.

"Well, well," cried the other, who had too good a knowledge of human nature not to know when she was beaten; and who possessed the quality, so useful in life, to be able to make the best of a compromise. "He must trust us — he shall trust us — or let him go hang!"

Then, with the glee of a child, she prepared for departure.

She was sorry not to see *ce bon* Sir John, but she must be back in London that night — and no doubt she would meet him soon.

"For you will come to Paris and work? Ah, it is a marvel, that Symphony! You will not regret it, my little Sarolta. To bury such a talent as yours! Pity you will not see Sady. Yes, she is in America, my love. Did you not know? She has had a success, over there, with her linnet notes and that winning personality of hers. And has she told you? — No, I will not be indiscreet,

but there are rumours that she and your cousin Mosenthal — ”

“What!” cried Sarolta, a gleam of mirth in her eyes, “what, poor little Chop? . . . How dare he aspire so high?”

“My dear, he’s already a great little man, on his own. He and Sady have been touring the States together. Tut, my dear, you know nothing. He has a future, I tell you.”

“He has indeed, if Sady cares for him,” said Sarolta softly.

As madame was driven through the autumnal mists, back to Chilburgh station, she pondered deeply upon Sarolta’s attitude. “She has cut herself away from the past as completely as she possibly can! Not even with Sady (Sady, her little providence!) has she kept up relations. The Mosenthals are well pensioned, I have no doubt, but it is quite clear she has not laid eyes on one of them since her marriage. *Ah, mais*, what ugly things people must say of her, who do not know! It is not baseness, it is not ingratitude, it is not the mean shame of the new fine-lady for the poor relations, it is not that she finds it more to her advantage to keep up with a Warborough or a fat Lady Caroline . . . no, no, it is not want of feeling — it is that she feels — too much, *la pauvre petite!* It is that she is afraid of herself; it is the sick shrinking from old association, the nausea of the past in one who has too cruelly suffered. *Sac-à-papier!* What then did he do to her, that monster of genius? And she had my photograph on the writing table!”

Madame Costanza had professed herself fully confident of success with Dr. Lothnar; nevertheless it was somewhat to her surprise that she received next day the Master's acceptance of Sarolta's conditions — acceptance without a single comment. The excellent lady promptly, however, took much pride to herself:

"He knows he can trust Costanza," she said gorgeously.

When Lady Holdfast, up in the North, read the singing mistress's jubilant telegram, a voice within her said: "He knows he can trust Sarolta."

Sir John Holdfast brought his wife to Paris, with the unalterable generosity of temper which characterized all his dealings with her. He left his pheasants without a murmur, and with amiable mendacity declared it was "great larks to be in Gay Paree."

Madame Costanza, her shrewd eye upon him, wondered many a time what lay under that still boyish affability of demeanour. It was quite clear to her that the whole affair was an anxiety to him. But then it seemed to her that all his relations with Sarolta were tinged with anxiety. There were lines about his mouth and eyes which spoke not only of doubtful thought, but of endurance, of long patience.

"It is my belief," said madame to herself with profound conviction, "that the young man is an angel."

As for Sarolta's voice — though the teacher grumbled and vowed that they had terrible work in front of them, and that she was only just in time to prevent what was worse than murder, in her heart she was enchanted with it.

"My dear," she wrote to Sady, "it is a marvel! I could cry out all the eyes of my head to think that anything so divine has been lost to the world."

In the early days of November Sir John and Lady Holdfast and Madame Costanza took the road to Frankheim. It was arranged that Sir John was to part company with them at Stuttgart to facilitate the scheme of Sarolta's *incognito*, and that he would only rejoin his wife after the concert.

"Oh, I say, but you won't mind my getting a ticket and coming to hear you?" he asked wistfully. "I'd like to hear you, you know."

"Of course not, Johnny," she said with the sweetness which Madame Costanza felt was such a surface thing.

"But you'll keep the secret," proceeded she, after a pause, drawing her dark brows together. She pulled off her wedding-ring and gave it to him. "This would lead to questions," she said. "At Frankheim I am Sarolta Vaneck, nothing more — you'll remember that."

"Oh, yes, I'll remember," assured Johnny. He put the ring in his pocket, rubbed his crisp brown head, and looked at her dubiously; but he made no remonstrance.

"He would make the perfect husband for a professional!" reflected the teacher. "What a pity he should be so rich!"

It was a very different journey from that which the girl had taken two years before in her second-class carriage, under Frau Hegemann's grim guardianship. As far as Stuttgart Lady Holdfast travelled with all the accessories of wealth and rank: the reserved carriage, the

cushions, the sable rug, the dainty tea-basket, the ministration of well-trained servants, the obsequiousness of railway officials — and above all, Johnny, Johnny who knew the exact angle at which his wife's head liked to rest; who knew the amount of air it was safe to admit into the carriage; Johnny who never obtruded his personality, yet had an instinct like a woman's for the precise moment when he might be of use. It was all accepted as a matter of course.

Once or twice Madame Costanza, though she blessed the circumstances which facilitated her own desire, felt as if she could shake the spoilt, indifferent wife.

"If Costanza had been like that!" thought the lady, whose matrimonial experience had been stormy.

CHAPTER XXIII

SAROLTA exchanged never a word with Dr. Lothnar on the day of the final rehearsal; he did not appear among the singers — only took his place at the orchestral desk. It was a dull November afternoon, and though, after the German fashion, the theatre was well warmed, the general impression was one of gloom and chill. At the best of times a rehearsal is a dismal affair: the great empty spaces that should be full of responsive human presences, the shrouded seats, the half-lighting, the work-a-day clothes of the professionals, the strange sounds of instruments and voices in the void that seems to engulf without giving back

But Sarolta was not nervous — she felt singularly mistress of herself and of the situation; a different entity in every way from that Sarolta who had feared and hoped, rejoiced and suffered, with such intensity.

Yet when Lothnar hurled himself into his seat with the well-remembered headlong impetuosity; when, without salutation to any one, he seized his bâton, held a moment's absorbed communion with himself, swept the orchestra with a lightning glance and then lifted his arm — she knew that Madame Costanza had been right, and that the old Sarolta, Sarolta the singer, was not dead: that under the white ash the red fire still burned.

She had a sudden sense as if life had been in abeyance these two years; as if her heart was going to beat again that had been so still; blood about to leap through her veins once more. But she caught at her fiercely earned self-control; she faced the old self with all the hardness of the new.

"I will not tremble and yield. I will not be his creature, his instrument to play upon. I will hold my soul my own, and his music that I give out I will give out my own way." So she spoke to herself and fought with herself, while that music's tragic splendour (madame had well defined it) rose about her like the waves of a mighty sea, beating upon every nerve and sensibility, as the storm wind beats on the solitary mountain-pine.

But Sarolta's strength had been gathered also in bitterness apart, in silent endurance, in utter disillusion. That is the strength that tells.

When she stepped quietly forward to her place, at the appointed moment, her pulses were steady; she knew that she would not fail.

The stage was crossed by a couple of glaring lights that flung equally dense shadows. Of deliberate purpose she halted within the circle of those unsparing rays, and she knew that Lothnar instantly flung his gaze upon her with a light in his eyes that seemed almost as searching. Then the nervous hand she knew so well measured the slow opening notes of her sad song.

The rehearsal proceeded without a single arrest. At its conclusion Herr Lothnar, without a word, dropped from his high perch and disappeared.

It was the useful Webel who brought news of the Master's gratification to the waiting performers — Webel the same self-possessed, businesslike personality as ever; only sleeker and more prosperous looking.

"He is satisfied," said this laconic being. And instantly strained nerves relaxed, and involuntary smiles replaced frowns of anxiety.

Madame Costanza was jubilant — but sarcastically ejaculated the old jeer:

"Satisfied? *Rien que ça!*" She wondered what he had expected! She herself had "wept like a calf," with enthusiasm. As for her pupil, *hein?* What did Herr Webel think of that voice now?

Herr Webel stiffly shook hands with Sarolta, but made no comment.

"He has grown quite *empotté!*" said madame vindictively to her companion as they drove back to the hotel where modestly they lodged together. "Since he has married that smug little widow of poor Friedhelm ——"

Sarolta, who had been staring out of the window at the familiar street scenes, turned her eyes slowly upon the speaker.

"Has Herr Webel married Madame Reinhardt?" she said dazedly.

A rush of overwhelming memory swept over her. . . . Once again she was kneeling by the death-bed, and Lothnar was raging above the shrouded figure in a wrath and a sorrow commensurate only with his own immense personality — "Any one else would have served you as

well — will serve you as well — miserable creature who could not even keep life in his splendid frame ——”

The droschke rumbled and rattled, and for a while there was silence. Then Lady Holdfast spoke again.

“She hated me in the end, that poor woman. I never knew why.”

“There was a good deal of slanderous gossip talked about you, my child,” said madame sententiously. “It is the fate of every artist.” She chuckled suddenly. “Frau Hegemann, I hear, has had a stroke and goes in an invalid chair, speechless. There is a justice,” she added piously. Then: “And to-morrow you triumph,” she said.

Sarolta wondered what to-morrow would bring. For to-night she had the knowledge that she had done well — that she had not failed in a single technical point. She was also assured of an increased power and depth of voice; but she knew too that she had not yielded herself — never could she do that again! To sing sweetly, clearly, correctly, with a due crescendo here and a measured *filé* there, as safely as a piece of mechanism . . . to the rending of Lothnar’s heartstrings — would that be to triumph? Nay, that she was strong enough to give, no more; there lay her triumph.

She smiled without replying. It was the smile that made madame feel cold.

The theatre had been draped in purple and silver as for a royal mourning. Lothnar’s whim was law in Frankheim, and even the exalted personage who was to occupy

the box surmounted for the occasion by the Imperial crown had signified his approval.

"It is only in this land," he was reported to have said, "that such noble ideals of friendship still exist: another sign of the virility of my people in these days of degeneracy."

Sarolta had clothed herself in filmy draperies of black *crêpe*; it was a garment fashioned by the greatest house in Paris, and the vogue of the day being for the Tanegra effect, it was peculiarly suited to the long slender lines of her figure. Out of the blackness the whiteness of throat and cheek showed with the loveliness of the magnolia flower.

"*Blanche comme une Polonaise!*" said Madame Costanza, surveying her critically before they started. "But won't you put on your pearls, my daughter?"

"Sarolta Vaneck with the pearls of Catherine of Russia!" smiled Lady Holdfast. "That would scarce look convincing, would it?"

"Ah, that *incognito*," mocked madame, "it will be the secret of Punch to-morrow all over Frankheim!"

"To-morrow I shall be gone," said Sarolta.

So it was without a jewel, the most mourning figure conceivable, that she sat waiting apart for her call in the artists' *foyer*. She had flung a black scarf over her head, instead of the plumed hat that madame had counselled. Her hands were locked together upon her knees. Statuesque in her sable draperies, her veiled head crowned with a coronal of black hair, her straight eyebrows drawn, her face set, she might have been the

symbolic figure of Lothnar's whole intention; an embodied Lament.

The other artists looked at her askance. How she had changed, the little Sarolta!

"Say, *mein Lieber*," said the chief bass to a companion, "what has happened there? The girl has had her story since we knew her."

The other shrugged his shoulders. "Probably her half-dozen stories," he answered brutally.

Then they were silent, for Webel had come into the room, and speech was not allowed anywhere in Lothnar's theatre once the music was started. He had a severe glance for the delinquents, but went straight to Sarolta and, without a word, laid a twisted note upon her lap.

She gazed at him inquiringly; without speaking, he turned away from her.

She took up the bit of paper then, unfolded it and read:

Sarolta — Sing thou for Lothnar to-night!

The characters, unusually large and black for German handwriting, seemed suddenly to turn to fire as she read. Involuntarily she crushed the sheet in her hand. Something within her — whether her soul, her heart, that imprisoned self, she knew not — fluttered like a wild bird startled from sleep. Clenching her hand, she strove to fight it down. Oh, it was not the old love, not any base kindling of a now forbidden passion; it was not that she longed for one moment of that past ecstasy; but it was as if her own murdered youth cried out for the pity of it! All the little Sarolta's dreams, all her soaring ambitions,

the knowledge in herself of her own rare gifts, the joy in them, the power she had had in her for a love unutterable and encompassing — all that was lost, that could come never again, never again! — it was the vision of what had been and the vision of what was to be. Sorrow rose in her like a tide, too deep for bitterness. . . .

And so, when she got up and went forth, and stood at last in her place to sing, it was not for Reinhardt stricken in his prime that she lamented, it was not for Lothnar she sang and the piercing grief of his bereaved genius — it was for the Sarolta that had been.

The strange composition ended with the solo which was hers to sing. As voice and orchestra fell into silence together, Sarolta for the first time looked down at the conductor.

Lothnar's face was livid pale, and the tears were running down it. Their eyes met: through those tears his were flaming.

"I shall never sing again," said Sarolta to herself, as she swept her single curtsy toward the royal box, and slowly withdrew — her long draperies trailing.

The *foyer* was crowded, and she paused on the threshold hesitating, then drew back in the shadow of the great screen that sheltered the room from stage draughts. Unnoticed she watched the scene, waiting for her opportunity to depart. There were too many there whom she had known, and nothing was further from her desire than to be greeted, congratulated, or questioned. She heard herself spoken of in many tones, high-pitched in praise and astonishment, as Madame Costanza, like a mighty vessel in full sail, cleaved her way through the throng,

receiving and acknowledging felicitations with a magnificent proprietorship.

Herr Webel, with an unwontedly beaming countenance, entered, piloting his wife — Frau Bertha, perceptibly plumper, increasingly self-satisfied, clad in rustling black silk (no doubt as a tribute to the departed), but adorned with a highly wired spray of lily of the valley, symbolic of her new bridal state. With no detriment to her evident content the lady had been crying: comfortable, easy, sentimental tears.

“Ah, yes,” she cried, as Madame Costanza effusively greeted her, “from heaven, surely, he has smiled down upon us this night. I cannot believe but that his presence has been among us. And so does my Conrad ——” She broke off. She had caught sight of Sarolta in the shadow, and their eyes had met across the to and fro. The little woman’s colour heightened, and pursing her lips, she turned her head away.

As if watching the doings of another world, Sarolta marked the movement, and had a faint amusement.

But reaction, after the poignant emotion of the last hour, was already full upon her. She felt unutterably weary. She longed to be away from Frankheim and Frankheimers forever. Above all she wanted to avoid meeting the man whose face had been wet with the tears her singing had evoked.

She made an effort to edge herself out of the room, keeping close to the wall. But the sound of Lothnar’s name springing suddenly from different sides arrested her.

Dr. Lothnar — where was he? Ah, the *Herr Doktor ist ja mit dem Kaiser!* Yes, the Emperor had sent for Dr. Lothnar!

Webel's smile grew broader: True, the Master was with the Emperor. Then came the cry: "He is coming!" and the groups rolled apart, as dry leaves may before a whirl of wind.

He came, striding. Dreadful it was for Sarolta that every detail of the past connected with him should be stamped upon her soul with such vividness. She remembered how she had seen him marching down the mountain-side, his cloak flying behind him, defying the blast. . . . Oh, those days in the little wooden house! The inner lament awoke again: would that she were lying as Reinhardt lay in the lonely hillside churchyard!

She would not meet Lothnar; she could not!

She made a swift movement of retreat, back to the dusky shadow of the screen, but it was too late. That moment's lingering, yielding to the bitterness of memory, had lost her her chance. The mad blue eyes were upon her. He advanced straight, disregarding calls, greetings, even touches, with the arrogance which he alone could make tolerable.

"With her, with her I must speak!" he was crying. He caught her arm and drew her into the light. "*Mit Dir!*"

She made no resistance, but it seemed to her as if she had been turned to stone. She had dreaded to see him again, dreaded the sound of his voice, dreaded unspeakably the thought of his touch; but now these things had come upon her, and she felt — nothing.

"How can one speak," went on the grating, harsh accents — those accents that once had been the dearest music in all the world to her — "with this chattering, this clatter?"

He grumbled into his beard, drew his brows into his stupendous frown; then with violent movements caught her by the arm again and dragged her back to the stage.

The place was empty save for a few scene-fitters. The curtain was down, the only light that of a standard at the wings. The rawness peculiar to every stage at such a moment was obtrusive in that space which had held the glamour of Sarolta's life.

"Away with you! — and with every one — right away!" ordered Lothnar to the workmen with a wave of his arms. Then he and Sarolta were alone.

There was silence at first between them. That gaze of his! From the first it had had the power of reaching her inmost self, stripping her to her very soul, breaking down all the natural barriers which divide one human being from another. It was upon her now; it demanded, it searched, it actually assaulted, but — she drew a long sigh — it left her unreached. She was holding the secret of her thoughts from him.

Then he spoke, both arms outflung:

"*Du!* . . ." So he had been wont to cry out to Reinhardt in highest, deepest recognition of creator to interpreter. "Sarolta . . . how you have sung my music to-night! — I trusted, and you sang. Yesterday it was not my Sarolta, but I looked at you and I knew that she was not lost to me — not like — like the other!

That could not have been! *Du!* . . . How you look at me! You have sorrow in your eyes. You sang my sorrow as it cries out in my soul. *Ach*, I knew it. . . . I knew it! Fate cannot fail the one who is born to dominate. My art cannot perish so long as you live. You and I — you and I together, Sarolta — it goes still! We can never be separated again, no more than the sound from the vibrating string.”

He came a step closer to her. In look and speech he had claimed her: now that his hands were laid upon her shoulders it was not more tangible a grasp.

“Thou, white one . . . art changed from the little Sarolta that stood so pale, trembling before me! Art grown strong . . . and beautiful! Dost remember my kiss, Sarolta? Dost remember the carnations I gave thee to pin at thy breast? All blood-crimson they were. . . . When thou and I kiss again, it shall be a wonder of crimson.”

He bent his head toward her — his breath fluttered her hair; then his grip upon her shoulders suddenly relaxed. He stepped back, and into the wild gleam, into the flaming eyes, there came surprise!

“How you look at me!” he said again. He was shaken with a laugh. “Has Iphigenia become wise? . . . Has Phædra turned prudish? Art afraid of the kiss without the ring? *Na* ——”

From his little finger he wrenched a narrow circlet. Perhaps it had been that with which he had plighted himself to her who once had had golden hair and who had grown gray before her years, and died mad. He

thrust it upon Sarolta's unresisting finger, where it hung loose.

"My ring, my ring! Thou shalt have my ring, my name and my love — thou who hast been given me to fulfil me. Oh, thou shalt sing through me in a voice such as neither gods nor men have dreamed of before this! Thou shalt be beautiful for those most beautiful whom thou shalt reveal to the world through me. Thou shalt be my Helen — Helen, the World's Desire. What!"

The word rang sharply loud out of the husky tenderness of the deep-noted, low-voiced speech which had seemed to hang murmuringly in the air.

Sarolta had made no sound, scarcely made a movement, unless the droop of the hand upon which he had thrust his ring could so be called. But from the inert finger the ring had slid off, bounded and rolled a little way.

"*Was!*" cried Lothnar again; from surprise the note struck on anger.

She was already walking away from him. He made a savage gesture to arrest her, but she turned her eyes upon him, and he fell back. While he had made his singular declaration of love, claiming her, out of his need, in superb egoism, her eyes had never left his face. They had been fixed on him desperately, with a kind of agony in them. Now she looked at him as if she knew him no more — nay, so great was the withdrawal of her soul that it was as if he no longer existed.

So she passed and went from him.

He stood alone in the emptiness looking after her, too utterly confounded to have room for other sensation.

Then, suddenly, as the darkness of the wing enclosed her, it came to him that not one word had she spoken, while he had spoken so much, offered so much! Only by a look had she answered — and this look had obliterated him from her life . . . him, Lothnar, the compeller of souls!

Conrad Webel and a few others of the Master's closer acquaintances were waiting in the artists' room as Sarolta came through. Their whispered talk fell silent at sight of her. Webel made a movement forward, but she swept past, gazing inwardly upon her thought.

The men looked after her curiously through the door which she left open behind her; they saw how she was met half-way by a tall young man, who sprang forward, an immense wrap of sable over his arm.

The unshaded light fell on his face — it was pinched with cold and stamped with lines of anxiety. He folded Sarolta in the cloak with careful gesture, lifted the high collar about her throat, and gave her his arm.

"*Ach*, is that the way with our Iphigenia?" said he who stood closest to Webel.

Webel looked at him blankly.

"I must find the Master," he said in a troubled voice, and went heavily back to the stage. The first speaker shrugged his shoulders.

"It snows," he said to the others. "Let us out! Who's for a bowl of *Glühwein*?"

The three caught each other jovially by the arm; but even as they started forward they were arrested by

the sound of laughter — a laugh so ugly and mocking that, involuntarily, they fell apart.

"*Gott! — wie das klingt! — Schauderhaft!*" cried one. And the other answered:

"So did the Master laugh on the night at the Alt-schloss!"

"It is snowing," said Johnny also, as he wrapped his wife in her sables. "And, oh, Sarolta, had you no cloak? It's lucky I thought of your furs! Not even a hat!"

He lifted the collar tenderly round her long throat. "Madame Costanza has gone on to the hotel; she says she will see that tea is ready ——"

"Oh, Johnny!" exclaimed Sarolta; she halted in her submissive advance; "I don't want to stay another hour in Frankheim!"

Sir John Holdfast remained silent for an appreciable moment, looking at his wife's white face.

"Right!" he said in his cheerful, everyday way. "I've got a car — a stunner, she'll roll us into Stuttgart in a jiffy. Stuttgart's quite a decent place. We'll drop Félicie a wire and leave Thomson at the hotel here with a nice message for madame. He can rejoin us to-morrow, with your luggage."

Thomson was alert at the door of the private exit, where a great Mercedes was throbbing and purring. Without the snow already lay white.

"Quick, darling!" warned Johnny; "mind the step." He followed his wife into the car and gave his instructions

through the window. Thomson saluted and walked off, and the Mercedes slipped away into speed with the ease of its perfect machinery.

They whirled on in silence for a little while after this. She was staring through the blurred window. Here was the fountain where they had lingered on the day after the "Iphigenia" first night. It gleamed white in the shaken light of a gas-lamp. . . . And here, somewhere in the darkness, must be the alley where Johnny had proposed for the seventh time. What was it he had said? "Pon honour, it's not for myself, it's for you! It's to take you out of all this." And she had passed him without a word — even as just now she had passed that other!

A trembling took her. He turned quickly:

"You've caught a chill!" he cried with a sharp anxiety in his voice.

His arm hovered about her, but tentatively; Sarolta was generally unresponsive to demonstrations.

"No," she said. "No — I was only thinking . . . Johnny, you don't happen to have that ring about you?"

"Wedding-ring? Rather!"

With some fussiness, for his heart began to beat faster, he dived into his waistcoat pocket and produced the circlet. Sarolta slid her ungloved hand out of the furs.

"Put it on again, please."

The young man's fingers shook as he obeyed. He had never yet heard that note in her voice.

"How cold your hands are!" she cried.

"Bit of a cold night," said he simply.

Like a wave it broke over her; the contrast between the man she had loved and the man who loved her! The contrast between the colossal egoist who had found in her nothing but the instrument of his art, to be cast away or picked up again as the mood took him — and this honest man who had waited and served so faithfully, so uncomplainingly; who was waiting and serving still. From the first moment Lothnar had violated her reticences, probed her shrinkings, rifled her most secret thoughts; John Holdfast, even on this night, asked her not a single question; he shrank from intruding upon a withheld confidence with a delicacy that was almost sublime. Ulrich Lothnar had made use of her virginal ardours, her innocent upspring of passion, for his own ends; he who was her husband had consecrated all his life to her, showered on her all he possessed, and made no single claim. Alas! what she had once given she could never give again! There was the pity of it. He who had moulded her as the potter moulds the clay, who had created to his will an Iphigenia, a Phædra, had left her a woman lamenting, a woman who mourned a murdered self. Yet, if that pulse of joy was dead in her, that spontaneous leap of the heart to love, she had surely still something left for her husband, something deep and reverent, something pitiful, sacred, and wifely; and, above all else, after this realization — had she not gratitude?

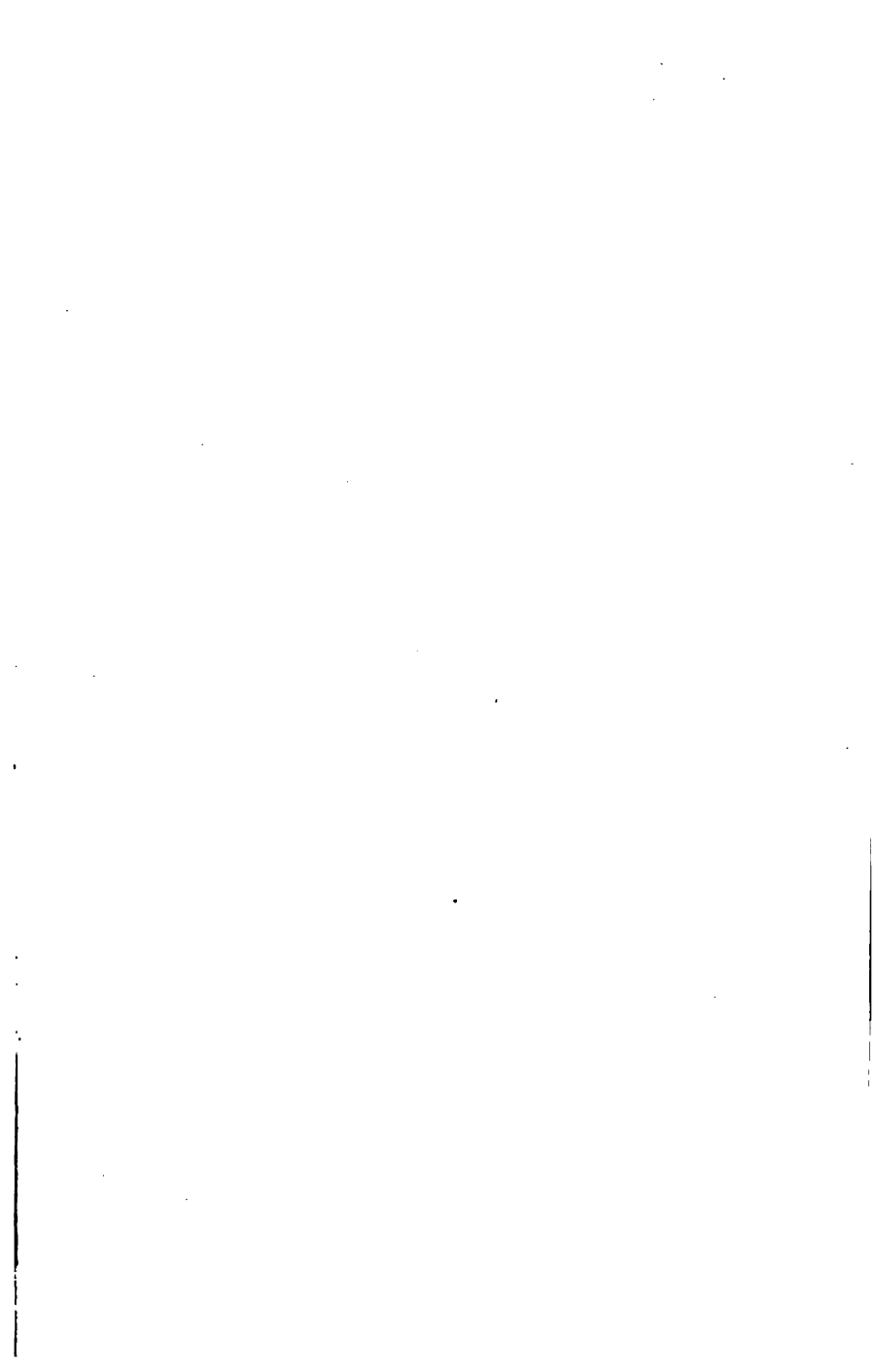
The passing flash of a lamp struck on his face, and she noted for the first time that look of sweet and patient endurance which had not escaped Madame Costanza; she saw the stamp of the strained anxiety, the wistful

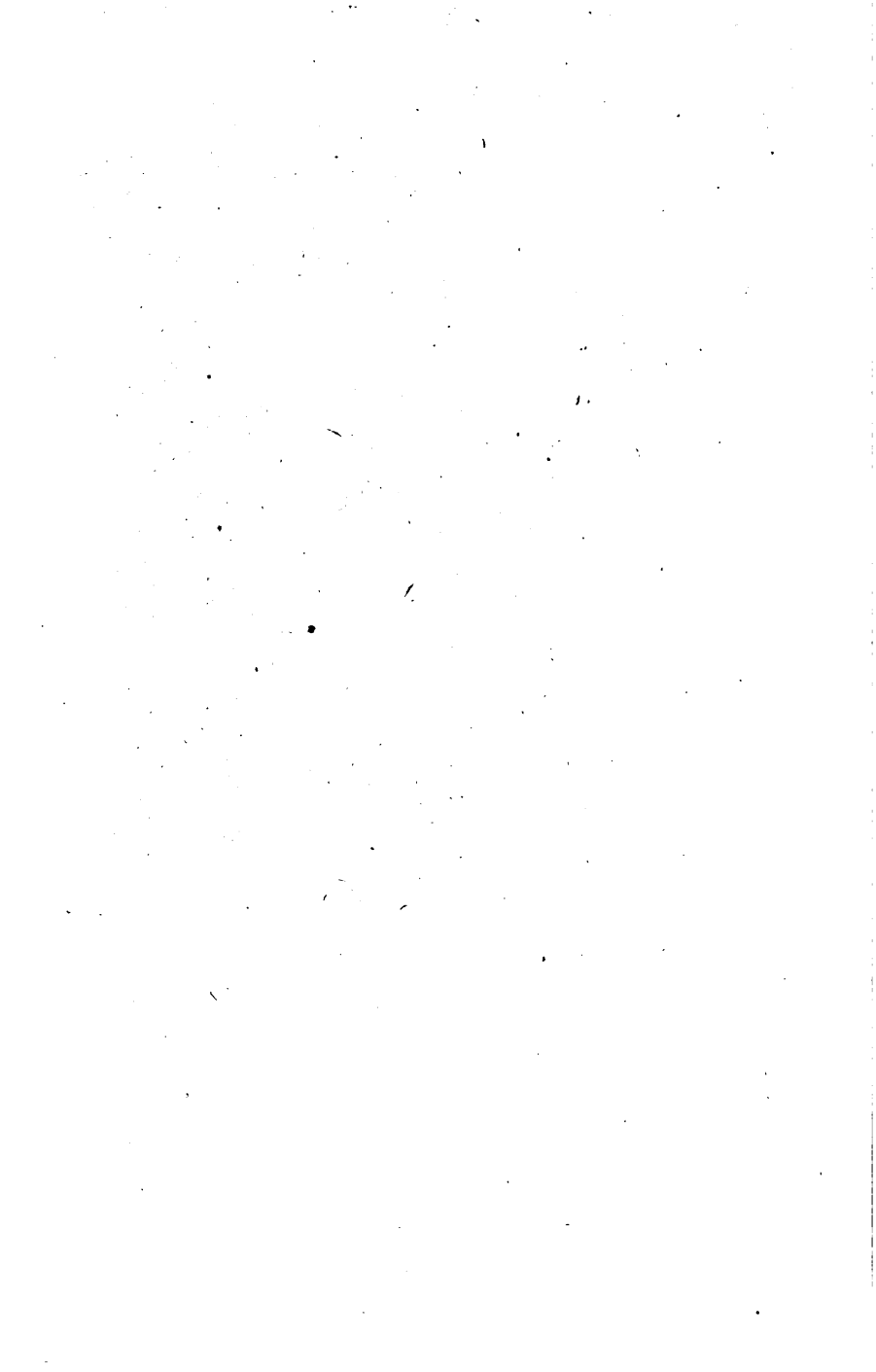
tenderness for her! With a sudden movement she cast herself upon his heart, crying out:

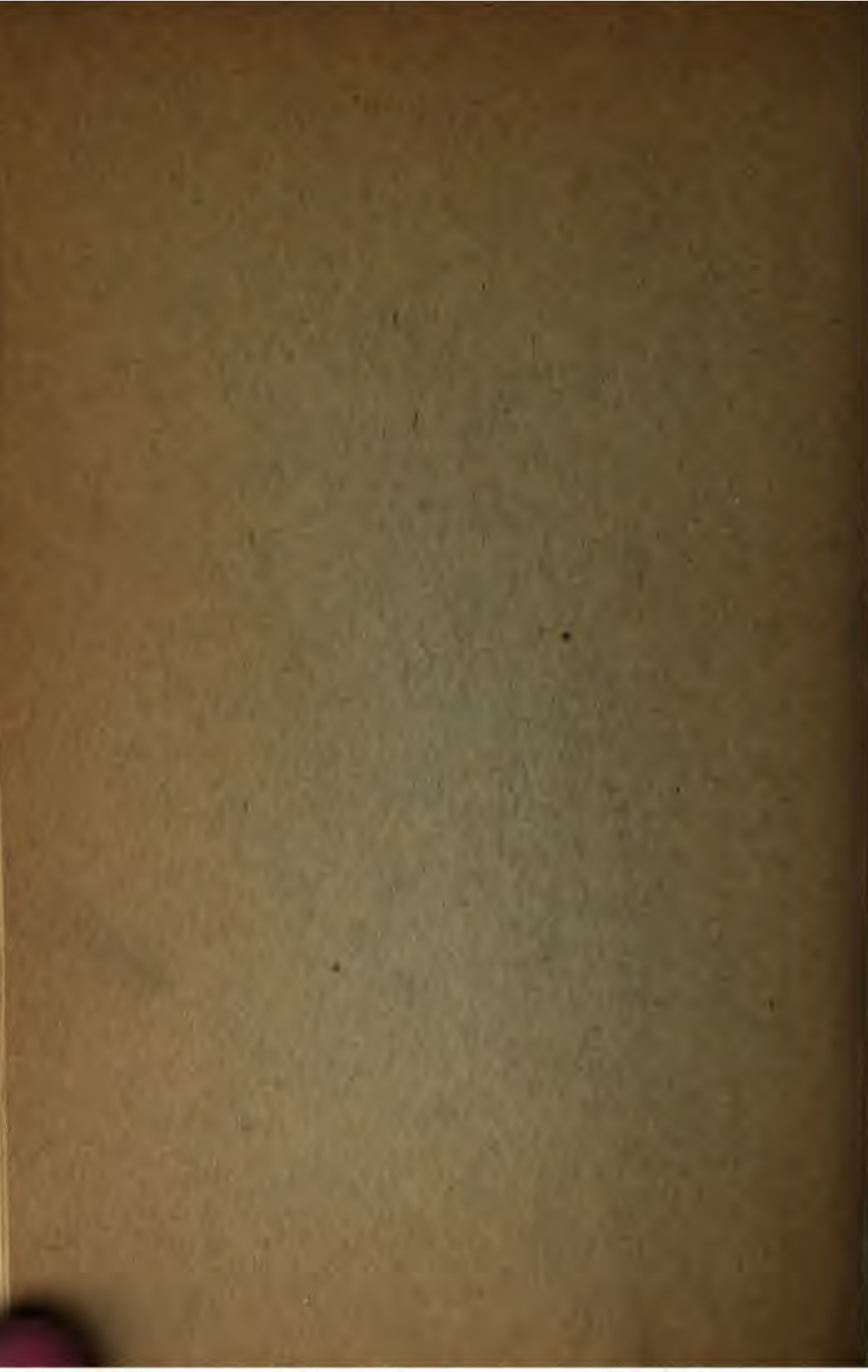
“Johnny, oh, Johnny, you are ineffably good to me!” Then the tears came — overwhelming — and rending sobs.

He flung his arms about her and held her tightly — afraid to speak lest he should blunder upon a wound. . . . Never before had she been so close to him as to give him her tears. There crept into his heart a hope that was exquisite.

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